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NOBODY'S BUSINESS.

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[Satchel series]

NOBODY'S BUSINESS.

BY

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TO MY BROTHER J. M.,

OF TENSAS PARISH,

WITHOUT WHOSE KINDLY ASSISTANCE THIS LITTLE BOOK MIGHT HAVE

PROVEN INDEED

NOBODY'S BUSINESS,

IT IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

A TRUTHFUL narrative of how Jack and I "pulled through" a sea of difficulties, in spite of friendly predictions to the contrary; telling why we did not "go under" in accordance with like friendly prophesies, with a succinct relation of the trials and tribulations thereupon attendant; writ with the desire to point a moral rather than adorn a tale—failing both if it do but serve to

"Tickle the public and make it grin,"

it will not have been written all in vain.

CONTENTS.

NOBODY'S BUSINESS.

CHAPTER I.

OLD GLOVES AND NEW IDEAS.

"MADGE, I tell you we must economize! Unless something now entirely unforeseen turns up, and that very suddenly, I'll never pull through on earth. We're bound to go under!"

I folded across my lap, as an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual resignation, two small, brown, shabby kid gloves, whose finger-tips (exact reproductions in kid of bursted muscadine skins in nature) had a moment before been pointed at John with a suggestive hint that a new pair would not involve me in an *embarrass de riches.*

It was by no means the first time, nor had I any idea it was to be the last time that I was expected to quail before the awful prospect of not pulling through, or of going under.

Had we not left the dear old plantation because we kept going under (water) every year? Had we not come to the city—the great, big, busy, rich city, where were work and bread for all—strong in the resolution that we *would* pull through, and that we would *not* go under? Yet here was Jack, our only man-stay and prop, planting his brawny elbows despairingly on the supper table, twisting his great strong fingers in and out his shaggy brown curls, glaring at me with tragic misery in his big gray eyes, and trying to scare me into the belief that if I persisted in my reckless demand for a pair of new gloves we must go under! Shocking!

"John," I say solemnly, "we *will* economize; you *shan't* go under."

And, with the fires of a noble resolve burning in my soul, I turned me about to see if my work-basket would yield up any sewing silk sufficiently brown and rusty to bring those divorced finger tips once more into loving proximity.

"'Smy's' opinion is that economy is of two genders—masculine and feminine. To do without anything new, to make everything old last twice as long as it is in the nature of things perishable to last, to tremble in secret at the gradual shrinkage of the flour in the barrel, to

look at pretty things and content one's self with ugly ones, is what is called feminine economy, or economy positive. To save when one can without looking mean, to spend fifty dollars on the chance of making a hundred, to keep the women folks at home well in check (not checks, please observe), to do as other fellows do in the matter of exchanging treats, etc., is what is called masculine economy, or economy speculative. Which sort shall we practice in order to pull through and not go under?"

"The levity of your remarks, 'Smy,' shows how poorly you realize the perils of our position," says Jack, turning his tragic regards from a certain magnetic grease spot on the table-cloth upon "Smy," a small bit of concentrated wisdom and brightness, and goodness, who was his sister by birth, and mine by heart adoption, as well as by marriage—a sort of resident sunbeam that shed light in our dark places—a species of moral ballast that served to maintain the equilibrium of the somewhat shaky little bark that Jack and I had launched in partnership upon a sea not always the smoothest—the leaven to our heaviness, our comforter, our indispensable.

Permit me to explain that "Smy" was not her name, but a ridiculous nickname that had been tacked on to her from her extremely rapid rendering of a certain sen-

tentious little "it's my opinion" with which she prefaced the ever-recurring homilies, warnings, bits of advisory wisdom, wholesome suggestions, etc., etc., with which she found it necessary to pelt Jack and me very often.

People who were not near enough of kin to be impertinent, or who did not love her well enough to make fun of her, knew her as Miss Eleanor Walton. Jack was Mr. John Walton, and I was (in fact am, and hope to be for a thousand years to come) Margaret Walton. At home we are Jack and Smy and Madge.

We called Smy our "great unterrified" in those dark days. She snapped her small fingers defiantly at Fate when that mythical personage wore her blackest frown, laughed poverty to scorn when poverty was pinching her sorest, and turned up that pug nose of hers with contempt whenever Jack talked in that way about going under.

"Jack," she said, with a sniff of scorn, "I think any man with the weight of only twenty-six years to carry, with long, strong legs like those, with a big brawny fist like that (rapidly indicating Jack's physical qualifications with a tiny bit of a forefinger), with a head on his shoulders like—"

"Those!" Jack snapped.

"That, and with presumptive brains hid away somewhere under those shaggy curls, who could even talk of going under is fit for nothing better than to die of a rose-leaf in aromatic pain. That's my opinion."

I think if it hadn't been for Smy I should have gone under myself very often at first, while I was learning John, you know. There was such a waste of tragedy about him, and I always was so susceptible to the tragic in real life or on the stage. And really, as Jack sat there by the little table, with nothing left on it but the table-cloth (for feminine notions of economy had impelled Smy and me to slip the tea things away, wash them up, and put out the pantry lamp), his eyes filled with gloom and meditation, still fixed on the grease spot that somehow or other seemed to fascinate or comfort him, his long fingers tugging at his hair, trying, maybe, to find out if, as in Samson's case, the secret of his strength lay therein, his eyes occasionally wandering from the grease spot to Smy, from Smy to me, always back to the spot with a restful intensity, I could not help wondering where Edwin Booth's chance of starship would have been had Jack chosen to go on the stage.

Women are single ideaed folk, and I had not been Mrs. John long enough even yet to place their true stagey

valuation on Mr. John's heroics. Therein was Smy my safeguard and my rock of defence.

The first time Jack told me that unless something turned up we must go under I felt a thrill of absolute terror. I wasn't quite clear as to what we would go under, if that improbable something did not turn up; but I loved Jack, and I did not want him to go under anything. It accorded much better with my wifely conception of his abilities that he should go over everything and anything; vaulting ambition, you know, and all that sort of thing. I preferred regarding the world as a ladder of ascent rather than descent for that dear old precious moody thing, who was at once so brave and so cowardly—such a man and such a baby.

Nor had I yet quite acquired Smy's dauntless ability, to laugh at the prospect of going under. So I fell to musing over the possibility of cutting down expenses yet a little lower. John's credit *should* be saved, if I wore sack-cloth, and no gloves. A fresh flower twined in by my own hands, must decoy folks, in considering my old winter hat a new spring one. I would do all my visiting and church going on warm spring days, for neither philosophy nor religion were mine in that sus-

taining degree which would enable me to brave a well dressed crowd in that old gray shawl.

Presently Jack left the table, stretched his long legs and arms tentatively, seemed satisfied that they were equal to another walk down town, took his hat from the peg, saying, "Well, girls, sitting here moping is a poor way to mend matters. I've been in this deuced town two months now, and found nothing to do. But as I do not suppose commercially, socially or politically, the demands for my services are sufficiently great to induce employment to hunt me up, I shall hunt it up. Don't sit up for me."

"Where are you going, John?" I asked nervously.

"To the devil, my dear," Jack answered sardonically.

"Ultimately, perhaps," says Smy, serenely; "but on the present occasion?"

"I really can't say."

"What to do, Jack?"

"That nut's harder to crack than t'other one," with which Jack dissappeared through the front door, leaving Smy and me to discuss the situation without manly advice or interference.

"Smy," I say presently, trying on my mended gloves,

to note the effect of purple sewing silk on brown kid, "I have an idea!"

"'Smy opinion," said my sister-in-law contemptuously, "that the trouble with us now is a surplus of ideas—old musty, fusty, rusty ideas, moth-eaten ideas about our position in society, about what is respectable and what isn't, what's proper for us to do, and improper for us to leave undone. We're hampered to death now with inherited ideas—"

"But, Smy," I interrupted impatiently (despairing of her breath, or her eloquence, ever being exhausted) "my idea is neither musty, fusty, nor rusty. It shines with the brilliancy of its own newness! It hurls defiance at our position in society. It will barely pass muster as a respectable idea! I'm quite sure it will suggest things not considered proper for us to do, nor improper for us to leave undone. So far from being a hampering idea, it tends towards the enfranchisement of our energies, our wills, and our muscles. It's a regular woman's rights idea—a brand new idea—and exclusively my own idea, inherited from nobody, which, if I were possessed of a grain of your prudent forethought I should certainly get out a patent for before even giving *you* the benefit of its wisdom!"

"Good!" said Smy, visibly delighted. "If your idea's a new one, and you're quite sure it's an improper one, and you didn't inherit it from your great-grandmother, I'm ready to listen to it."

CHAPTER II.

MY IDEA.

Not wishing to dazzle my sister-in-law too abruptly with the unique splendor of my idea, I considered a gradual ascent to its glittering heights advisable, by means of a few pertinent interrogatories—mental stepping stones, you perceive—so I began with: "Smy, do you remember that day at aunt Drew's Christmas dinner, how we startled our kinsfolk, *en masse*, by telling them of our resolution to let that man have the plantation three years for putting a levee around it?"

"And repairs generally, as per contract," Smy hastily interpolates (she has a wonderful turn for business).

"And how we had resolved to go to New Orleans and make our own living in the meantime?"

"Do I remember that day?" Smy echoes impressively. "Can I ever forget that day?"

"How they jeered!" said I.

"And sneered!" said she.

"And laughed!"

"And chaffed!"

"And called us three innocents abroad!"

"And three geese, which was a double-barrelled shot at Jack."

"And, 'three prodigals'—"

"Who shouldn't have even an unfatted calf on that inevitable occasion, when we should all creep back to the bosom of our family, sorrowful, repentant—"

"Ragged and hungry—"

"Singing in sad chorus the appropriate melody of "Give a Poor dog a Bone?"

"Exactly!" said Smy, somewhat irrelevantly.

"Can you remember a single expression of sympathy or encouragement offered us on that occasion?"

"Not one."

"And do you remember what we said, Smy?"

"*Verbatim et literatum?*"

"I don't remember that any of us said that." (Smy went to a better school than I did.)

My sister-in-law's laugh was the best part of her, good as the whole of her was. She here laughed one of

her ringing, merry, good humored laughs, with just enough derision in it to inform me I had made a goose of myself, and said, "Goosey! word for word? No. Because, you know, grandma Walton, and uncle Phil, and aunt Drew, to say nothing of a score or two of cousins, were all persuading, dissuading, conjuring and abusing us at one time. But I do remember how Jack got on his feet, in the midst of the verbal hail-storm, put forth the whys and wherefores of this move with a conciseness, calmness, resolution and boldness that I never knew before was in the boy."

(Smy is her brother's senior by one whole year, yet here he is the first one to despair.)

"No such thing; the best of men like to be pitied and cuddled by the women folks at home. I'll wager at this moment he's carrying it with a bold front down town among the men."

Thus reassured, I proffered another stepping stone.

"And what did we say, sis, you and I?" I asked, coaxingly.

"We said, whither Jack went we'd go. His downs should be our downs, his ups our ups. We vowed that we would follow him through the wide world; and that if our fate was to be the fate of Kitty Clover's pig, who,

while it lived, lived in clover, and when it died, died all over, we would at least have the satisfaction of knowing that we had clovered and died together. At least, that is what we meant."

"Precisely; but, Eleanor, we don't propose to creep back at all, do we?"

"Not unless there should be a universal annihilation of more improved modes of locomotion," she answers, with levity. "We're not going to give up, are we?"

"Indeed, no. But what's become of your idea?"

"Developing in perfection like the bud of promise still tightly unfolded in its hard green calyx," I answer, taking a short flight on my own responsibility.

"At our own present rate of progress," sniffs Smy, "'smy opinion that before your bud of promise expands sufficiently to receive the benefit of my critical observation my bud will return and order us both to bed."

"Eleanor, I say," alarmed into gravity by the hint of Jack's sudden interruption of our counsel, for somehow or other my best ideas and firmest resolves have a trick of eluding my grasp if I dally with them too long, "why should not you and I keep John from going under?"

"What else are we doing from morning unto night

but thinking of Jack, mending for Jack, baking, making and brewing for Jack ? "

"Oh ! I know in a stay-at-home, lady-like, dainty fashion we help Jack all we can. But why should not we put our own shoulders to the wheel ?—standing back to back, side by side, like good comrades, and fight the fight out with him in the broad arena of the world —go into the thickest of it with him and for him ? "

"Do you mean, why can't you and Jack and I shoulder three muskets and stand side by side in the highways, with a halt and deliver for every one who passes ? " Smy asks, with a glimmer in her eyes. That I regard as an invitation to come down from the dizzy heights of metaphor to the safe level of common sense.

"I mean, why cannot you and I seek some honest, active, respectable and renumerative occupation that will fill up the dreadful leisure of these city hours, fill up our own private purses, keep John from the wearing necessity of supervising the flour barrel and the lard keg, and yet in no way militate against our position as ladies and gentlewomen ? "

Smy looked somewhat pleased and somewhat scared.

"Jack would never consent," she said, presently.

"I know he would not, for Jack is a slave to inherited

notions concerning the beautiful helplessness and dignified good-for-nothingness of Southern ladies. Therefore, we must emancipate our slave. But it must be gradual emancipation. At first he must know nothing whatever about it. All things are forgiven to the successful in life. When our secret efforts towards self-help and help for him are crowned with success, we can boldly tell him what we have done without any fears for the result."

"Margaret," says my sister-in-law, with contrite eyes and humble voice, "I owe you an apology."

"For what, Smy?"

"For my stupid lack of appreciation of your wonderful astuteness, your wifely heroism and your universal superiority."

"Smy, you're laughing at me again."

"I'm not. I'm adoring you."

It was only in moments of the strongest emotional excitement that Smy found it necessary to wind her arms around my neck, and while I patiently submitted to a cessation of deglutition to kiss me on each eyelid, and on the forehead, tip of the nose and chin, so that, when on this occasion she went through with that performance with even more than her usual deliberation, I knew that my idea had found favor in my sister-in-law's eyes.

"But," she says, subsiding into her chair and calmness once more, "what shall we be, washerwomen?"

"No," I say, regarding our four feeble hands contemptuously, "we couldn't if we would."

"Seamstresses?"

"Never!"

"Visiting governesses?"

"We're pretty specimens to think we could teach anybody anything."

"Then how? That exhausts the received list of feminine occupations."

"But I did not say I was going to confine myself to a received list. That is just what I'm not going to do."

"Oh! the bud's expanding. But if we're not to be teachers, nor seamstresses, nor washerwomen, nor chorewomen, what are we to be?"

"I don't know."

"Then I wouldn't give a shoestring for your idea after all."

"You haven't heard it yet."

"Oh!" a little blankly.

"My idea is that every morning, as soon as we're sure Jack's gone for the day, you and I shall go out in a straightforward, manly, honest fashion and look for

employment. No matter what it is, so that our muscles or our brains are equal to it, and it accords with our own individual ideas of propriety and respectability."

"But Jack!"

"Must be hood-winked."

"How?"

"By an unlimited use of subterfuges, white fibs, manœuvres and evasions. That is the only feature of the whole business that I hate. But necessity knows no law."

"Madge," says Smy, very softly, "maybe the angel that wiped out uncle Toby's oath will drop an obliterating tear on our fibs and evasions."

"Maybe," I answer. "But Jack is too deeply dyed in the wool of Southern prejudices for us to risk the truth. He would taunt us with forgetting what was due to our position."

"But other people?"

(I knew afterwards that a portion of Smy's questioning was just to try my mettle.) "Other people!" and I treated her to a fine imitation of one of her scornful sniffs. "What we do, or where we go, or what the final outcome of our Declaration of Independence shall be, is *nobody's business*."

CHAPTER III.

"RESOLVED."

HALF an hour later, when Jack reëntered our little sitting-room, he found his sister and his wife discussing "crochet mats" and the superiority of "split" over "single zephyr," for "nubias," with such tenacity of opinion and fervor of declamation, as should have convinced him, if it did not, that the two females with whom he was burdened for life, were two of the prettiest, mildest, most harmless, and least daring of womankind.

The fact that our dear old John had *not* "cast that shadow from his brow," in compliance with an airy objurgation to that effect sent after his retreating form by Smy, and that the half-boyish moroseness of the earlier evening had deepened into a stern gravity that made him absolutely awe-inspiring, only served to strengthen the sinews of my inward resolution, that I would no longer content myself with being a save-mate only, but, from to-morrow, would prove myself a genuine, stirring, active helpmate.

I fell asleep that night with a delicious sense of exaltation and heroism, that I am sorry to say did not abide with me always.

It was my husband's wont to go straight down town every morning from the breakfast table, returning only to a five o'clock dinner. So fearful was he, poor fellow, that the single moment wasted at home would be the very one in which should occur that turn in the tide which taken at its flow leads on to fortune, etc., that he barely gave himself time to swallow his food like a Christian gentleman.

This morning, for the first time, Eleanor and I viewed without dissatisfaction the prospect of seven or eight hours in which there was no probability and the barest possibility of our seeing him.

Bustling around at a great rate, so that my unusual absence should not be the occasion of any household confusion that might excite Jack's suspicion, I was ready by ten o'clock, booted and hatted (spurred, I felt like saying), and standing at the foot of the stairs calling to Smy to "come on."

"Ye-es!" came from Smy's upstairs chamber, in dreamy, absent tones. I drew on one glove and waited. I drew on the other and fidgeted. I pulled the little

piece of dotted net still tighter over my imprisoned nose, and sent a second "Sm-y-i!" upstairs in impatient crescendo.

"Pres-ent-ly!" came back in placid diminuendo.

I rushed spitefully into her presence, springing upstairs with all the velocity compatible with "pin-backs." "Smy!" I snap, "have you forgotten?"

There she sat, a perfect picture of literary abstraction and studious distraction, a pencil in hand, pair of scissors at hand, papers on hand, newspapers, I mean, of every size and every description, weeklies and dailies, folded and unfolded, and half folded, on the bed, on the table, on the floor, on her lap, while, utterly oblivious of me or my excitement, or her own promise to go with me, she bent her small brown head in absorption over a paragraph I could not see.

"This is a pefect shame!" I say resentfully.

"That's my opinion," she drawls, turning her big eyes reproachfully upon my ruffled visage. "You tempestuous creature, it's a wonder your gusty advent has not blown my chances of a fortune to the four winds of heaven. Luckily the windows are all down."

"Have you decided to become an editor?" I ask. "Is that your road out of our difficulties?"

"Me an editor!" Smy laughs, too much amused to be particular about grammar. "No, indeed; but you see, Cherie, there is nothing like being armed with documents. Now observe" (and she held open her porte-monnaie, so that I might observe). "I am informed by these friendly newspapers" (waving her hand over the papery chaos), "which, by the way, do make my private apartments look a little sanctum-sanctorumy this morning, that I can make a fortune in a day, in fact that fortunes are lying about loose in divers and sundry places in this wonderful town, if people would only read the newspaper and find out the localities. I've been doing that very thing. I shall not have to walk to the end of the rainbow for my pot of gold."

"Where then?" I ask.

"Firstly, I am told that 'parties willing to work can make three to five dollars a day (business perfectly legitimate and respectable; the most refined ladies engage in it), by calling at No. 14 Grand street.' I have cut that out, so that when I call at No. 14 Grand street I can speak as one having authority. Think of it, Madge, 'three to five dollars a day!' Again, 'Work for all; hundreds in it. Call at 201 Morley street.' And again,

'Lady agents wanted to sell an article every lady will buy.'"

"Agent! Smy—you! I feel slightly sea-sick."

"I thought," says Smy, "we were to do *anything* that our muscles or our brains were equal to, if it accorded with *our own* ideas of propriety."

"I wonder what the article is?" I say, taking refuge in womanish curiosity, as Smy thus hurls my own words back at me.

"Can't say, but I've cut out just nineteen of those encouraging paragraphs, and surely some one of them will just fill the requirements of two decayed gentlewomen."

I can't speak for myself, but I'm sure as Smy stepped out of the front door by my side, her trim little figure arrayed in a gray poplin of fashionable make, a jaunty hat and feather crowning her soft wavy brown hair, her big blue eyes sparkling with the novelty and excitement of our errand, there was ne'er a sign of decay discoverable about her, but from the curve of her pretty instep to the thin, wide nostrils of her fine straight nose, the gentlewoman was evident.

If I were to detail the minutia of that day's doings

the recital would tire my readers almost as much as the day tired us.

Three o'clock found us at home again, hot, hungry and tired, no wiser and no richer than when we went out, with a tell-tale air of depression about us that I felt would never do.

"Eleanor," I say, with a rebuking air, "there is a general appearance of fatigue and failure about you that is sure to invoke some affectionate but inconvenient inquiries from your brother."

"I was thinking as much of you," she answered. Then she fell to laughing in the most inconsequent fashion.

"Are you contemplating varying the morning's exercises with a bit of hysterics?" I ask, piling my gloves on top of my veil, which, with my hat and parasol and purse are heaped in my tired lap, while I lie back in one of the parlor chairs, wishing vainly for one of the scores of little black hand-maidens that used to swarm at my bidding, "way down upon de old plantation."

"No; but, Madge! oh my! I wish you could have seen your face when we got out in the street again from the lady agent place! You looked like you'd been stealing."

"I wish you could have seen *yours*, you looked as if you hadn't life enough left in you to steal."

"Are you going to give up because we did not find our pot of gold in Grand street or Morley street or that —that other stupid's ?" I ask, presently.

"No, indeed. I think if I ever muster energy enough to get these hot boots off, and bathe my face and get a nap before John gets home, I'll be in trim for another campaign."

"I'm afraid we haven't reached that pitch of self-forgetfulness or self-denial that makes people oblivious of such sybaritic requirements as cool slippers and refreshing naps," I say, despondently.

"'Smy opinion we never will, sis ; there's not the making of a St. Simeon Stylites between us both."

"But before we have to face John, I have another proposition to make. I believe it is customary with men when they are about to undertake anything big or hazardous or terrifying to pass a series of resolutions ('Papers of Commitment' they ought to be called), in which they commit themselves to a certain course of conduct so fully and unmistakably that there's no decent escape from it."

"Exactly."

"Now, I'm afraid if we don't do something of that sort, Smy, say something in black and white that will reproach us with its own unchangeableness when we're inclined to mutability, that we'll flag in the good work and be tempted to slip sneakily back into 'our sphere.' I feel sensibly weaker now than I did this morning."

"So do I; but I thought it was hunger in my case. You know we generally lunch about one o'clock," Smy answers, suggestively.

So I refreshed my famished co-adjutor with brandy fruit and Cracknell biscuit, after which she gratefully drafted the following resolutions, which had almost as many amendments as the Constitution of the United States before they were pronounced perfect:

"Resolved, firstly, That we love our husband and our brother very, very—"

"That sounds as if there were two men in the question," I interrupt her to say.

"Heaven forbid! One's like to prove too much for us. I'll amend that. Now, then. 'Resolved, firstly, That we love our John W. Walton very dearly.'"

"Sounds sorter formal, as if we weren't on the best of terms with our John W."

"Madge, resolutions *have* to be formal, or they wouldn't be binding," says Smy, sententiously.

"Resolved, secondly, That if the united efforts of two loving-hearted women, strong of soul if feeble of—feeble in—feeble—feeble—"

"Say bone!"

"I will not."

"Flesh!"

"No."

"Sinew, then."

"Sinew! sinew! yes, that will do. If sinew can avail aught they shall not be spared to prevent our well-beloved brother from going under."

"Well-beloved brother sounds awfully like Masonic obituary resolutions, Smy."

"I consider that a high compliment."

"Resolved, thirdly, That we will let nothing but sickness or death interfere with the earnest labor we have this day begun."

"That's perfect."

"Resolved, That we will not permit our home to be the abode of gloom and despondency, but (especially when Jack is at home) will veto all business discussions,

all financial worries, all vain discourse about ways and means."

"Hear! hear!"

"Resolved, That sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof—and—that—that—"

"Care killed the cat," I say. "Smy, isn't it just possible to resolve too much?" My last words are accompanied by an irrepressible yawn.

"Just possible," she wisely assents. "But how do you suppose men wind up their resolutions, Madge? I'm perfectly willing to stop, but don't know how."

"With a hereunto we do set our signs and seals, I expect."

"Maybe," says Smy dubiously, so we solemnly sign our wise resolutions.

CHAPTER IV.

PLESHAM'S.

"ELEANOR," I ask, the next morning, as we are preparing to start forth again, "have you read over our resolutions this morning? If you have what conclusion have you come to?"

"About them, or you or me?"

"About them in the first place."

"I consider them a substantiation of the assertion, that 'a little nonsense now and then is relished by the wisest men.' I read them over on the principle that a boy whistles in the dark—just to keep up his courage, you know. So, on to the charge." And we start down the street together.

Suddenly I come to a halt with the inquiry, "Smy, is it absolutely necessary for us to hunt in couples? for I think a division of forces might improve our chances of success."

"Not at all!" she answers. "One can fly east, and one can fly west, and one can fly over the cuckoo's nest. That exquisite line of poesy embraces the magic three of you, Jack and me. It must have been written in the spirit of prophecy."

"Eleanor, we go on like two scatter-brained girls that haven't a serious idea between them."

"Indeed; but we have though; we have Jack between us, and 'smy opinion he's an awfully serious item in anybody's life. If it were not for the safety-valve of nonsense, you and I, my sister, would fill untimely graves."

"Very well; let us each 'gang our ain gait' until St. Patrick's big bell shall tell the hour of one, then we

will both start for Plesham's book-store and go home together. We staid out too long yesterday."

"Very good! I'll fly east," says she.

"Good-bye and good luck," say I.

"The same to you," with which Smy trots briskly out of sight, and I stand motionless for a moment, wondering in what direction I shall begin operations.

I am thankful for the fact that I really need some hair-pins, so I find my way into a hair store and make the selection of my pins a matter of time and deliberation, shrinking painfully from the self-imposed task before me. Somehow the little shop assumes the proportions of a refuge from possible impertinences, probable stares and inevitable curiosity, wherever and whenever I shall present my application for work. (Smy says we don't look shabby enough nor hungry enough to avoid being considered impostors.)

My shopping completed, I stood idly for a few moments on the threshold of the door, watching the busy bustling stream surging ceaselessly up and down the broad street. Ever and anon a familiar face would flash across my retina (for we were not entire strangers in the city) passing as rapidly as the changes of the kaleidoscope, but before my spasmodic effort to obtain recogni-

tion could avail aught, the face would be nowhere. Hurry-scurry, pell-mell, push-rush, they passed me, young men and old men, young women and old women, young children and old children. The one as fast as the other, all rushing madly to arrive at—no place, all fiercely eager to accomplish—nothing. I was irresistibly reminded of that curious piece of poetry, "How the water comes down at Lodore."

It's atmospheric influence, I thought to myself, atmospheric influence, and until I, too, learn to hurry, scurry, rush, push, I'm afraid I'll never accomplish anything in this fierce mäelstorm.

Then I found myself envying a pretty girl who was sitting serenely on one of the stools in the hair store, evidently waiting for somebody. She was the one restful object within reach of my eye. Plenty of money and plenty of leisure were indicated in her general appearance of self-satisfaction and quietude. Presently there darted by me, with the swiftness of a swallow, the somebody she had been waiting for, another girl, pretty well-to-do, and with no duty more pressing that enjoying herself, as she soon made evident.

"Oh! Jule, here's our Mardi Gras tickets. Now, let's go to Shawle's and order our dresses."

"But the photos?" her friend answered.

"Oh! I'd forgotten them. Here they are." And the *cartes* were thrown on the counter for my lady's inspection.

"Why, the coloring is perfectly abominable!"

"I know it is, and Cassoni implored me not to take them, but I told him they were for friends who were going to start to Europe to-morrow and we had to have them. He says his regular colorist has gotten on a terrible spree and he had to pick up any one he could get."

"I think he must have picked up a sign painter then. Cassoni should employ female colorists. They don't get drunk and they don't color a lady's picture as if they were white-washing a barn door," says my lady Serene, with soft-voiced indignation.

I turn and give her a grateful look. It flashes upon me that my own need of hair-pins, my search for them in that very store, my unwonted dilatoriness over their selection, my eavesdropping upon those two girls, and Cassoni's colorist's spree are but so many links in a chain welded by the hand of Providence to help us "pull through." I wonder if I'm a fatalist?

"Young ladies," I ask, boldly, "will you be so good

as to give me Cassoni's address?" which they do, supplementing it with a bit of advice, "Don't go there at present if you want colored photographs." But I decline their advice and go straight to Cassoni's.

And when St. Patrick tells the hour of one, it finds me sitting flushed with triumph on one of the stools in at Plesham's, leisurely turning over the leaves of a pictorial paper, wishing that Smy would hurry up so that I may tell her of my Providential good luck. Tell her I have found work to do. Plenty of work, paying work, genteel work, that I am to be permitted to take home with me. I can hardly hope that my little sister has been so fortunate.

A few minutes later she joins me. She comes towards me at rather a sober gait, and wearing an expression of countenance that completely mystifies me.

"You've been successful," she says, as soon as she is close to me; "I see it shining in your eyes."

"I have beyond my brightest expectations. And you?"

"I hardly know. I've got a good deal to tell you, and we'll have to take counsel together. Wait till I get home."

"But tell me a little, Smy."

"It depends," she says, with a queer little smile, "on

my ability to procure a dozen alligators, ranging from infancy to senility."

"Smy, are you crazy!"

"No! but I verily believe I have been in contact with a man who is."

Which was every word I could get out of her before we were safely at home.

To our surprise and consternation Jack opened the front door for us himself.

"What are you doing here?" I ask, starting back in some confusion.

"Come now, that's cool. Considering I'm supposed to be the head of the house I'm standing in, what are you doing there?" he retorts.

"Shopping," I reply, triumphantly, and hold up my bundle of hair-pins. "What is it, Jack?" I ask when the front door closes us all in, "I know you're dying to tell us something."

"I am, my dears; I came all the way up town, rode too, at that, to inform you that there is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we may."

"Is that all?" we ask in chorus.

"All you'll get out of me on an empty stomach," is his materialistic reply.

CHAPTER V.

EXPLANATIONS THAT DON'T EXPLAIN.

"Now, Jack, what has destiny been doing to you?" Smy asks, with the air of being quite ready to call Destiny to account.

We had finished our own dinners, and sat watching him with patient impatience, secretly convinced that nothing on earth would ever prove sufficiently startling, unexpected, or important, to interfere with John's digestive organs.

"She has been putting a paper cap on my head, and a bed-ticking apron across my manly bosom," Jack answers, with a backward shove of his chair, and a final sweep of his napkin across his splendid mustache.

"The paper cap, I suppose," I say (taking John's assertion in a purely Picwickian spirit) is symbolical of Folly's cap and bells, but I fail to grasp the meaning of the bed-ticking apron. "I really think, John," I continue, in a gravely rebuking voice, "that two simpletons in so small a family are quite enough. Eleanor and I can make geese of ourselves without doing much

damage, but from you, as a man and the head of a family, we have a right to expect seriousness of discourse, gravity of assertion, and universal superiority in the management of that unruly member, the tongue."

"Deuced shaky headship. But if you will insist upon dull common-place, Destiny has been making a saddler of me."

"Jack!"

"John!"

"Ladies!"

"My brother in a paper cap and a dirty ticking apron!" says Smy, with a sob in her voice.

"It needn't necessarily be a *dirty* apron, Eleanor," I say sharply; "besides, if I can stand it, I should think *you* could!"

"And if I can stand it, I should think you both could!" says Jack.

"What would aunt Drew say?"

"And uncle Phil?"

"An honest saddler's the noblest work of God," says Jack, combatively.

I give Smy a reproving glance. We are certainly not sustaining Jack properly.

"It is honest," I concede.

"'And his muscles and his brains are equal to it,'" says Smy, taking her cue, and sustaining me with my own words.

"And it accords with his own notions of propriety; and what Jack sees fit to do for his own and our maintenance is nobody's business."

"But, tell us, Jack, how you came to do it."

"I can't exactly say that I did come to do it. In fact, I came to do something very different. When I gave up the plantation, and asserted so blatantly that I was going to the city to *work*, I had a vague notion of winding up in a commission house, law office, or newspaper sanctum, all three highly respectable occupations, and not at all shocking to an ex-planter and one of the "have beens." But I found that none of the commission merchants seemed to hanker after me. I concluded I was too old, and too poor, to make believe work in a lawyer's office; and the newspapers seemed to flourish without the benefit of my bottled up erudition. Then I came down a step, and contemplated drugging—"

"Drugging who, John?"

"Going into the drug business. But I had forgotten too much Latin. I was weighed in the medicine scales,

and found wanting. The grocery business offended my nostrils and insulted my ancestors. I never could abide the blended perfume of whiskey, brown sugar and tobacco. I sought occupation as a dry good's clerk, but the proprietor happened to be close at hand when a lady asked me for organdy, and I gave her alpaca. So, after a brief but brilliant engagement of half an hour, I was requested to resign my position and save my employer the trouble of kicking me out."

"Strange you never thought of turning life insurance man," says I.

"My dear, there are already three hundred life insurance agents in this town to every two hundred inhabitants. After having led the life of a tramp for two months, until I had almost concluded there were but two courses left open to me, suicide or whittling dry goods boxes at the street corners, I had occasion to go into a saddler's to see if that saddle uncle Phil asked me to order was finished ; and when the saddler apologized for his failure to keep his promise on the score of being short-handed, I immediately made application for work, and am sincerely glad to say I got it."

"Poor old Jack," says Smy, very softly as if she were almost afraid to trust her voice to say more.

While I ask, hesitantly, "Jack, will you *have* to sit cross-legged?"

The roar of laughter with which my husband greeted this inquiry acted as a tonic on our fainting spirits.

"Strikes me, girls," he said, as soon as he could say anything for laughing, "that you regard me as more an object of pity now than you did when I was a gentleman loafer."

I feel convicted of cowardice and of the most womanish inconsistency—I who have been playing the braggart about not confining ourselves to inherited ideas, and all that sort of thing. So I turn on Smy with, "You know, sis, he might have gone into a corner grocery."

"Or committed suicide," says Jack, looking solemn.

At which Smy laughs with the tears still standing in her sweet eyes, and putting her arms about her brother's neck, she says, "John, you're a hero and I'm a coward. And I love you better than tongue can tell."

"That being the case," says Jack, "I'll take you both to hear Aimee to-night. You know I wont have to put on my cap and apron before to-morrow."

All this while I was consumed with a secret desire to hear Smy's explanation of her day's doings, and to know what on earth a dozen alligators had to do with it.

Late as it was when we got home from the opera Bouffe, I only waited till Jack was safely in bed, when slipping across the hall in nocturnal garb, I curled up in a knot on the foot of Smy's bed, determined not to sleep before I heard it all.

Smy was combing out her long thick hair, and peeped at me wonderingly through the wavy masses, while I tucked a shawl around my bare feet and affectionately clasped my knees within my folded arms.

"What on earth!" she says.

"Smy," I make answer, "sleeping on unsatisfied curiosity is just as sure to give me nightmare as a supper of lobster salad. I'm suffering from both to-night, so I really am afraid to go to bed."

"'Smy opinion rheumatism will be your next ailment, and that'll pinch worst of all," with which she half smothers me in shawls.

I wriggle my mouth above my woolen envelop and repeat, "I must hear about your crazy man and the alligators, Eleanor!"

"Well," she began, "there's not so very much to tell, but what there is, is certainly very curious. If my explanation don't explain, it will be because, as yet, I have hardly made up my mind what to think of the old

gentleman who has made me a conditional promise that will be glorious if it ever comes to anything."

"That will do for the way of prologue. Now for an allegation touching the alligators."

"Well, as I was going leisurely down Thalia street, hardly knowing what to be at first, I heard a cry raised of 'mad dog! mad dog!' close behind me, and saw people scudding in every direction like dried leaves before a high wind. You may depend I did not stand upon ceremony or upon the order of my going. I was just in front of a handsome door opening immediately upon the sidewalk. I sprang up its two low stone steps and with a savage push let myself into, oh! Madge, the strangest place! It was a great big handsome room, with lofty frescoed ceilings, filled to confusion with massive elegant furniture, that looked as if it hadn't been dusted in a century. Wherever there wasn't a door or a window there was a book-case reaching from floor to ceiling, and packed to repletion with books, books crowding the tables, tumbling off the chairs, stacked in the corners. Books, books everywhere, and—"

"Not a drop to drink," I fling in wildly.

"More books than you and I ever saw in all our lives, Madge. It was as still as death in there, close as it was

to the roaring city; the doors and windows seemed to have been constructed with a view to keeping out noise and—"

"Mad dogs."

"A dim religious light prevailed that only made the solemn old room more awe-inspiring than ever. The ticking of a handsome clock on the mantel-shelf, and the faint plash of the water every now and then, as if a fish floundering were all the sounds I heard. After I got over my mad-dog fright, I began to look around me in a new sort of alarm. I had evidently invaded private property. But to whom should I make my explanations and apologies? So far as I could discover there wasn't a human being within eye or ear shot. I made up my mind to retreat as I had come, uninvited and unwelcomed. But when I tried to open the door again it wouldn't open. My violent slam had evidently sprung a secret fastening. Here was a go—"

"Eleanor! that is regular street boy slang. I'm shocked."

"So am I. I was about to add 'as Jack would say'—"

"It's all very well to lay it on poor old Jack."

"Well, then, here wasn't a go. When I found out I

couldn't get away, I began walking around my prison very much as a mouse might traverse a mouse trap, until I began to feel a sort of proprietary interest in my trap. I supposed some time or other somebody would come along who had a better right there than I, when I would explain matters, make my apologies and ask to be liberated. At every step I took some curiosity met my gaze. Here it was an aquariam full of creeping things, then a jar of hideous lizards, then a glass bowl in which tadpoles were visibly turning to frogs, and nests of snakes enough to give a man *mania à portu.* Gradually I worked my way toward an open space in one corner of the room, where I found the greatest curiosity and surprise of all. A space had been cleared by shoving books and chairs, and jars and globes, into a still more chaotic heap, and in the space so cleared, sat an old man, with a magnificent bald head, bending over a large tub of water, in which floundered an expiring young alligator. I walked boldly up to him, and modestly said, 'Good-morning, sir!' He took no more notice of me than if I had been one of the dusty old chairs or globes that belonged there. I tried it again, 'Good-morning, sir!' but he never once raised his eyes from the alligator in that tub. I glanced about me to see if there was no other human being discover-

able, when my eye fell on a big ear-trumpet. Ah, ha! I thought, that's the trouble. He's deaf. So, armed with the trumpet, I approached my jailer and stuck his end into his unresisting hand. Then for the first time, he acknowledged my presence with a good humored stare and an amiable 'howdy do?' Then I shrieked my apologies through the trumpet, making him bounce clear out of his chair, and asked to be let out of the door.

"'Ring for somebody,' he said testily; 'I wouldn't lose sight of that alligator two seconds for a hundred dollars.'

"'It's dying,' I said, contemptously.

"'What do *you* know about it?' he asked, for the first time regarding me with a stare of interest.

"'I was raised among alligators,' I answer, upon which he seized my hand with fervor, saying, 'You don't say so, you don't say so; sit down, my dear child; don't be in a hurry; you must tell me something about the interesting creatures.'

"That was the first time, Madge, that I ever felt proud of my intimacy with alligators. But the prospect of shrieking what I knew about alligators through that trumpet wasn't to be thought of, so 'Can't I write it?' I yelled, firmly convinced that I was dealing with a

madman, whom I must humor, or risk some horrible punishment. 'Yes, yes,' he said eagerly, pushing me bodily toward a desk; 'but can you write?'

"'Can I write?' I echo indignantly; 'of course I can.'

"'Maybe you can, and maybe you can't,' says my jailer. 'Young ladies that know all about alligators and can write don't swarm in the streets of this city.'

"'I can get you a dozen alligators,' I said rashly, indignant at his evident doubts of my veracity.

"'Child,' he said, with such an eager look in his great big eyes, 'don't say that unless you really mean it.'

"I felt frightened, and wanted to get out of there, so I fell to writing furiously, telling all that I knew about the habitat and habits of our swamp alligators. In the meantime the old man had gone back to his tub. Presently I heard him say in the saddest voice, 'It is dead, too soon, too soon.'

"I soon finished my composition on the alligator, and handed it to him. He looked at it with surprised delight. 'Do you always write like that?' he asked, 'or were you trying?'

"'That is the only way I know how to write,' I say.

"'And can you really get me a dozen alligators?'

"'If you really want them, I can.'

"'Who are you, any how?' he asked.

"'My name is Eleanor Walton,' I said. 'I am from a Southern plantation, that we were too poor to hold on to. I am looking for something to do that will help to keep our heads above water.'

"'And I,' he said, 'am Dr. Wagner. Everybody knows me. I'm writing a book on natural history. My knowledge of the alligator's habits is not accurate enough to satisfy me. You write a hand like copy-plate. Procure me those alligators, by way of proving yourself a girl of your word. I'll give you one month to get them in. Bring them here to me and I'll see if I can't help you to keep your head above water. Now go and ask folks who the devil Dr. Wagner is?' Then he opened the door for me and I ran. *Voila tout.*"

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. BLUXOM.

Of all the ills that poor humanity is heir to, the supremest is your "person of the best intentions!"

Right across the street from our new home there lived just such an "ill."

To our physical perception, at first sight, she was a buxom dame, of fair proportions and cheery aspect. To our moral perceptions (offspring of experience) she was a serpent's tooth, or, the same serpent in the grass, or, an eating cancer on the body social, or anything else altogether horrible and abominable you may choose to liken her unto.

I speak strongly of our neighbor, Mrs. Bluxom, for even at this late day I cannot forget how I suffered through her "best intentions." And out of the fulness of my memory my hand transcribeth. In an evil hour John had summoned her husband, Dr. Bluxom, to attend me through a slight attack of neuralgia. Alack, the hour! She insisted upon regarding Jack, Smy and me as three innocent irresponsibles, who, either from

lack of natural capacity, or by reason of our rustic rearing, were entirely unfitted to cope with the dragons of vice and monsters of iniquity that were ready at any moment to devour us for our rash temerity in rushing into the arena of city life

In vain we tried to convince her that we were a match for any dozen villains she could produce! In vain we boasted in the most shameless fashion of our perfect familiarity with that "monster of hidden mien," vice, in its city garb. In vain we tried to "bluff" her by a show of brassy independence that was the veriest sham. She *would* smile that superior smile of hers, and say, in that superior voice of hers, "My dears, you know nothing of city life. Your lessons have all been conned in the lap of nature. Your experience of human nature has been confined to the rural districts, where honor and morality go hand in hand with pastoral simplicity and arcadian content. My intentions are the best in the world, you *must* permit me to warn you, etc. If you young people had a mother," she would continue, "or even an aunt, or anybody that did not look so absurdly young and childish, I should really feel impertinent, but as it is"— upon which she would proceed to be as impertinent as it was possible to be.

For several weeks after Jack and I had found work (not that I had been as honest he had been and told my business), it began to seem as if we really were going to "pull through" with the greatest ease imaginable. It is true, Jack (who did so dearly love to lie abed of mornings), had to eat his breakfast and hurry off down town at a most unearthly hour of the morning, but that only gave me all the more leisure to prosecute my secret industries.

Eleanor grumbled at a great rate over her own enforced idleness, calling herself a drone, a burden, a loafer and lots of other pretty pet names, through all of which I would say soothingly, "Wait until your alligators come."

(She had written to the plantation for one dozen small alligators, and Mr. Stedman, the lessee of our place, had kindly promised to see them packed and shipped. They abounded in our lake at home.)

It was during this time of my content and her discontent that, one morning, she at the window, whither she had rushed, hoping that the ring we heard at the door might be a carrier with her alligators, I at my table coloring away furiously on my photographs, that I heard her exclaim, in a voice of disgust, "Here she is again!"

"Who?"

"Mrs. Bluxom! I do think there ought to be some police regulation to protect people from such a nuisance."

"After which, my dearie, I hope you find yourself in a proper frame of mind to go down stairs and assure her of your delight at her visit."

"Indeed, I shall do no such thing."

"You don't really mean, Smy, that you are going to make me lay aside my work when I am so anxious to finish this batch this morning?"

"No," she says, relenting, "that would be too bad. I have heard that it is always the fate of a drone to be stung to death, and I suppose Mrs. Bluxom is simply the divinely appointed instrument of my fit punishment;" with which she sailed down stairs, head defiantly erect and bristling all over with her touch-me-not air.

Half an hour elapsed, in which I had almost forgotten Mrs. Bluxom's existence, as I dreamily plied my paint brush and thought of the glad, proud time which my feeble hand was helping to hasten, when, John's debts all paid, the dear old homestead redeemed and reclaimed, we could shake the dust of this hot toilsome city from our feet and go back to live on the old lake place, where the

mocking birds would sing us to sleep every night. I thought of the peach and the plum trees, that must be in the full glory of their pink and white blossom-tide just now. How I wished I could stand under their low spreading branches for a wee moment, and shake the sweet smelling snowflakes down on my head.

I had been to Cassoni's that morning for fresh photos, and I think it was the Royal street flower girls that had set me to thinking half sadly of home. They had offered me crocuses and violets and hyacinths in poor little pinched bunches tightly bound with coarse threads, and the pale, sweet faces of the flowers, so dear and so familiar, seemed to my foolish fancy like friends in bondage in a strange land. I had brought a bunch of them home, and loosed their fetters and given them their freedom in a shallow glass dish, and as I worked they expressed their gratitude in fragrant sighs that stirred me with a sadness that

> "Resembled sorrow only
> As the mist resembles the rain."

A harsh slamming of the parlor door, and a swirl of skirts as Smy swept upstairs, evidently in a state of intense excitement, brought me back with a terrific jerk to a knowledge of Mrs. Bluxom's exodus and Smy's advent.

"Margaret," she says (cheeks and eyes ablaze), "what do you suppose our lady of the best intentions came here this morning for?"

"Can't imagine," I drawl.

(There is a tacit understanding between Smy and me, that when one gets excited, the other is to keep cool, preserving our equilibrium on the see-saw principle, one up, t'other down.)

"She came here to stab Jack in the back!"

"Why didn't you yell 'Police!' or 'murder?'" I ask, too acustomed to Mrs. Bluxom's dagger-pointed inuendoes to be stirred to wrath thereat readily.

"Because!" she answers, "as I remarked before going down, unfortunately, police regulations stop short of Mrs. Bluxom, and as long as it is only a man's reputation that is murdered, the murderer is amenable to no law of God or man."

I had been touching up my subject's nose with a delicate shadow, meaning presently to take Smy severely to task for becoming so wrought up over a gossip's venom, when the word reputation brought me to a stand still with my brush aloft and my cheeks burning, as I asked, "Whose reputation?"

"John's!"

"Eleanor, has that meddler been casting any slurs upon my husband's reputation?"

"Yes, she has."

"Tell me word for word what she said," I say, with enforced calmness.

"Well! of course she began with her usual formula of 'good intentions.' When I gave her your excuses, she said that 'for once she really rejoiced in your absence, for she had come to see me privately, on a very important matter, that concerned all three of us very nearly.' She hoped 'I knew her well enough by this time to feel assured that she had come over this morning with the very best intentions, and, as we three young people, fresh from the pure sweet influences of our rural existence, ignorant of vice, and unsuspicious of danger, had always elicited her deepest sympathy, she hoped'—Here I coughed so impatiently that she curtailed her prologue and asked me with some abruptness if my brother's wife, poor young thing, had any idea of how and where her husband spent his down-town hours, and I told her you certainly did know where he spent them, at his place of business—*how*, was nobody's business."

"Oh! Smy!"

"I just couldn't stand her, Madge, and I did *not* feel called on to tell her that Jack's place of business was a saddler's shop."

"Of course not. That is certainly nobody's business but his and ours."

"'Smy opinion exactly. Then she said, that 'much as it pained her to undeceive me, she had come with the best intentions to perform a disagreeable duty, from which she should certainly not be deterred by a hasty rebuff on my part; that, in view of my youth and ignorance, she could readily forgive.' I sighed resignedly and asked her 'please to let me hear the worst at once.' Then she imformed me that 'a reliable gentleman of her acquaintance had seen Jack at the cock-pit!'"

"What's that?" I ask, wonderingly.

"Haven't the slightest idea, and wouldn't have asked her if I'd been dying to know. But it must be something terrible or she wouldn't have enjoyed telling me so."

"Maybe he fell into it—you called it a pit."

"Perhaps; and the reliable gentleman helped him out. 'That he had been seen participating in a street fight—had been seen coming out of the lowest sort of

a drinking saloon!' and in fact, according to Mrs. Bluxom and her 'reliable gentleman'—"

"Who is, of course, none other than old Bluxom," I fling in wrathfully.

"Our precious old Jack is on the railroad to ruin, and going at neck-break speed."

"Of course you don't believe a word of it, Smy," I say, with tart decision.

"Of course not," she answers, with equal decision.

None the less a sombre silence falls between us, and an uneasy sensation takes possession of my soul (which, of course, was no part of Mrs. Bluxom's best intentions).

"Jack *was* young, and he was of a gay inclination, and the seductions of the city were manifold—who knew?"

Mrs. Bluxom had sown the wind—who was to reap the whirlwind?

CHAPTER VII.

WAR OF THE ROSES.

WOMEN are funny creatures! But to see the funny darlings at their very funniest, one must see them at a matinée. We went to one the very morning after Mrs. Bluxom's visit. And the way we came to do it was this: An old schoolmate of Smy's and mine had married some years before, and settled in "the city" (which means to all Louisianians, New Orleans), and she was always rushing in upon us at the most unexpected moments, with projects for our "amusement and *instruction*," she would saucily add.

And would be told for her sauciness, that with two such instructresses as herself, and Mrs. Bluxom, we were in no danger of preserving our rustic innocence too long.

Well, as I said, or was about to say, the morning after Mrs. Bluxom's last assault Smy and I were lingering over the breakfast things in a decidedly blue frame of mind.

We had tried valiantly to think nothing of what the

doctor's wife had said, but Jack himself had made our efforts of no avail, by looking so red and queer when his sister had asked him, with startling suddenness that morning, what a "cock-pit was," and had entered into such an elaboration of detail, as had fully convinced us that he knew whereof he spoke.

So, of course, we felt blue, but we made no comment on it other than by an unusual heaviness of spirit and quietness of tongue. Upon our gloom, Julie Pemberton (that friend of ours) burst like a sunbeam, with "Oh! girls, I've got such a treat for you! The Barber of Seville! Dumestre as Figaro! at the opera house this morning at eleven. You just must go with me!"

"Delicious!" cries Smy.

"But Jack! He knows nothing about it," I add.

"Men, the right sort of men, that is," says Julie, "are not expected to know anything about matinées."

"Doesn't Mr. Pemberton know you are going?" I ask.

"Yes, he knows it, and that is all. If you've any wifely scruples about going without Mr. Walton's knowledge, we can go by his office and let him know," says my friend.

'No, that will not be necessary," I say, adding, "Smy, I really believe it will do us both good."

"I know it will. I need it."

So we went.

It was at the opera house. Everybody wanted to hear the "Barber of Seville," and hear that fascinating Mons. Dumestre as Figaro. And I wanted to hear the Barber of Seville, and see that fascinating Mons. Dumestre too. For, as I belonged to the country, I never had heard the Barber of Seville, never had seen Dumestre, never had been to a matinée. I enjoyed the three sensations in one on that occasion, and they came very near being my last sensations of any description in this vale of tears, for, that I am alive to tell the tale of that morning's experience, I consider to be by a special and direct interposition of Providence.

It was well for us that Julie, although country reared as well as we, had been in the city long enough to act as if to the manor born. She was a complete mistress of the grand art of "how-to-do-it." I made her purse-bearer, feeling sneakily conscious beforehand that I should never be able to muster the necessary amount of cheek to thrust myself successfully upon the notice of the ticket man, for I don't suppose, in country or in

city, there ever was a more pusillanimous creature than myself, when it comes to barter of any description. Why, I am afraid of the very cash boys in the stores, all of which, I suppose, comes from my unfortunate "country raising."

"We must start early," Julie had said, "in order to get a good seat."

But it seems as if the idea of starting early was by no means an original one with her, for although half past ten o'clock found us in front of the opera house, we were about the last of six hundred who had done as we had done—"started early."

I was lost in admiring astonishment at the scientific manner in which Mrs. Pemberton (Julie), a fragile little scrap of a woman, wriggled her way through the apparently impenetrable masses of silk, barege and alpaca, through openings invisible to the naked eye, procured three tickets, and wriggled her way triumphantly back to where we meekly awaited her, on the outskirts of the crowd.

For one mortal half hour we stood in front of those inhospitably closed doors. It is true the bills had expressly stated, "The doors would be open at eleven," but then, you know, women have but foggy notions, at

the best, as to the value of time; so with the precision which is so preëminently characteristic of the sex, we had all succeeded in getting there by ten, and considered ourselves much abused females because the appearance of the first ribbon had not acted as an open sesame, involving a total alteration of the programme. Well, thanks to the pushativeness of our city friend, we succeeded in obtaining a precarious footing on the third step from the top of the broad flight of stairs.

Inch by inch we advanced, until I found myself sandwiched between a pretty little French lady on one side, redolent in patchouli and violet powder, and a buxom nursery maid on the other, who held in her arms a baby! a cherub of some six months or so (the property of the French lady), who was making futile attempts to swallow its own fist and its mother's portemonnaie, at the same time growing red with disappointment over its signal failure.

To say that it was warm would be a milk-and-water expression, and I hate milk-and-water anything. It was hot! fearfully and unmitigatedly hot. And such mitigation of our suffering as fanning might have afforded, was denied us for the good reason that we were as powerless to use our hands as though we had been be-

reft of those useful members. As well might a handcuffed convict undertake to dance the shawl dance, as any one attempt to fan under such circumstances.

At this stage of the proceedings (if that can properly be called "proceedings" which does not proceed at all) Julie, acting up to her frequently avowed principle of "pushing one's own in the world," recommenced that process of wriggling that had so excited my wondering admiration when she had gone for our tickets. And so successfully did she wriggle, that in the space of a minute, one precious minute, which I had foolishly wasted in an abortive attempt to raise my arm and open my fan, she had advanced about two yards ahead of me. Smy clinging to her arm fiercely, and the impenetrable phalanx of crinoline closing in behind them, I mournfully concluded that they were lost to me forever.

Looking back over their shoulders, they airily beckoned me to come on! Refinement of sarcasm! Telling a woman to come on, when it is as much as she dare do to wink her eyelids for the jam. I sent a little plaintive "I can't" over the sea of intervening bonnets as the only response circumstances would permit me to make to their kind invitation.

I tried to keep my eye fixed on a brilliant red rose in

Julie's hat, for I knew if I lost sight of that I might as well give up my own ghost and my ghost of a chance of seeing Dumestre and the Barber of Seville.

"Don't let them mash my baby to death, Mary," screamed the top slice of my sandwich to the bottom. "No'm, not if I can help it," returned the bottom slice, in a voice curiously suggestive of suffocation in a feather bed. A gentle but irresistible swell of the tide had lifted us all on to our toe-tips, and excited the mother's liveliest fears for her helpless offspring.

"Will you please, miss," she said, addressing her frightened self to my disgusted self, "let me get next to my baby?"

"If I can, madame," I gasped, making a desperate effort to unpinion myself. "I will give you my place," she said. I gladly mounted one step as she receded one, and thus got a fraction nearer to my beacon, the crimson rose, that was bobbing at me so encouragingly from the triumphant head of my successful friend.

My right-hand neighbor—in the exalted position to which I had been promoted by the maternal fears of the little French lady—was a very fat old lady, very fat indeed; I am sure (in stock parlance) she would have "scaled" two hundred, added to which she was lame!

I felt sorry for that old lady, I did indeed. I wondered if she had no father or mother, or sister or brother, or great-grandchild, who had sufficient control over her to keep her at home. I felt sorry for her as she stood there puffing and panting and growing apopletic in the face; I felt sorry for her when the great beads of perspiration came rolling down from her forehead over her poor red nose, unchecked by hand or handkerchief; I felt sorry for her when she gave a frantic little jerk at my arm as the surging crowd nearly lifted her off her crippled feet; but I felt sorrier than sorry for her when she looked at me so wistfully and said, in plaintive broken English, "Meese, I ees getting so vera seeck at my stomick."

"Madame," I replied, sententiously, "so am I, and it would be a remarkable order of stomach that would not sicken under such circumstances. What nation under the face of the sun but the American nation would labor so hard in pursuit of pleasure?" but she either did not understand me, or was too sick to indulge in polemical discussions, or she took my remarks as personal and offensive, for she relapsed into sullen silence and fell to sniffing at her vinaigrette.

At last those cruel doors were opened! With a base

selfishness worthy of a regular "city bred," I deserted my fat old lame lady and made a wild rush for my perfidious companions, clutching frantically at an arm of each just as they reached the door.

Then began a regular "sauve qui pent" scramble, a modern war of the roses ; white rose pushing red rose to the left, red rose whirling white rose to the right ; little dainty kid gloves doubled themselves up into Liliputian fists, and "pitched" insinuatingly into the backs of the defenceless front ranks. Pretty little children made battering rams of their heads by way of promoting locomotion. Mothers screamed, "My child! my child!" Children yelled, "Mother! mother!" One unfortunate, dropping her ticket and not daring to stoop to recover it, found solace in audible sobs. Another unfortunate stumbled and disappeared from mortal vision beneath a sea of rushing, crushing, scrambling, trampling, running, jumping daintily booted little feet, whose owners were utterly oblivious of politeness, kindness, humanity, even ordinary decency in their determination to see Dumestre as Figaro.

"Talk of the refining influence of women upon men," I gasped, as Julie forcibly squeezed me into one-quarter the space I usually occupy when seated. "I begin to

think it is pretty evenly balanced, for if ever I came in contact with a lot of charming savages, who needed somebody or something to make them behave themselves, it is the present assemblage. And all, forsooth, because there were no men about to condemn or laugh at them!"

Julie only laughed, and wiping the moisture from her forehead, prepared to bring her lorgnette into position.

"If this is the way your city people play," says Smy, with a tired inspiration, "how I should hate to see you at work."

Have you ever been in the country in early spring time, when the peach orchards were in full bloom, with a million of black birds chattering in their branches? If you have, it will not be necessary for me to tell you how things looked and sounded inside of that house up to the time the curtain rose. It would take too long to tell about the lady who went into hysterics on my right, or of the two dears who got into a violent quarrel on my left, and fought it out with waving opera glasses and furiously nodding plumes, because one dear got the seat the other dear wanted. Happily, music hath charms

to soothe the savage breast, and with Dumestre's appearance order reigned supreme.

"I hope you're satisfied," says Julie, at the close of the first act; "you disapprove so of purely feminine—"

"Scrougings," Smy suggests.

"I have counted six of the restraining sex in the parquette. And I can make out all of them but one. Who is that, I wonder?" She pointed to a certain corner, then handed me the lorgnette. I adjusted it and swept the crowd.

There! with his side face turned towards us, in close and earnest conversation with a *female* whose rich garb and charming hat was all I could see of *her*, was *my husband! Jack!* John! Mr. Walton! Oblivious of my presence, oblivious of Smy's, apparently oblivious even of Dumestre, he bent his head toward his companion and talked! and talked! and talked!

I was glad that Julie's slight acquaintance with him and defective eyesight had prevented her from recognizing him at that distance.

CHAPTER VIII.

"SO DID I."

"MADGE!" says Eleanor to me, late the next day, "I went down town to-day!"

"So did I," I answered, with tightly compressed lips and moody eyes riveted to my work.

"I mean way down town, as far as Jack's."

"So did I."

"And—I—went to the saddler's shop."

"So did I."

"And—I—found Jack gone!"

"So did I."

"And I asked the man where he was."

"So did I."

"And he laughed and said, 'Dog fight 'round the corner, 'sposed he was there.'"

"He said, 'Man shot at Baker's groggery, 'sposed he was there,' when I asked him."

"When were you there, Madge?"

"At eleven. And you?"

"At one."

"We've gone into the detective business, haven't we, Madge?" she says, with a sorry attempt at humor.

"It looks like it," I answered, plying my brush with savage industry.

"On the best fellow in the world."

"He used to be."

"But you don't believe that John is really throwing himself away, Madge?" She asks the question in that assertive way that almost compels assent.

"No. I suppose he is simply sowing his wild oats. They say every man has to make one crop in a life time. I only hope he won't find it a more ruinous agricultural venture than sowing cotton on an overflowed plantation."

"What did you drop Julie Pemberton's glasses on the floor for yesterday, at the matinée?"

"To break them. But I had them mended this morning."

"You didn't want her to recognize Jack?"

"Exactly."

"Did you speak to him about being there?"

"Of course I did not. I never coax confidences from Mr. Walton. His communications must be spontaneous or they are valueless," I answer with superb dignity.

"Margaret, 'smy opinion that we have let Mrs. Bluxom poison our minds against our precious Jack."

"Jack has done it himself," I say with trembling lips. "No one but himself *could* make me believe ill of him."

Then we both fell to crying in an aimless showery fashion that somehow or other made us feel better.

We didn't mean to discuss Jack any more that day, for not having quite made up our minds what to think, and not caring to make him the subject of a systematic course of backbiting, we charitably dropped the veil of silence over his late mysterious performances.

To all appearances we are the same three people that we have always been, as we sit down to dinner with Jack's handsome face opposite me. But there is an impalpable bending beneath invisible crosses.

"I've got something to read to you, girls," says our straying sheep, as we draw in a circle about the centre table. That is the focus of our evening industries. And I secretly rejoice that my husband's proposition to read aloud will obviate any necessity for converse, hypocritical or otherwise.

"It's headed 'The War of the Roses,' he begins,

then clears his throat vigorously, blows his nose and reads :

'Half an inch, half an inch,
Half an inch onward ;
Up to the lobby steps
  Pushed the six hundred.
Forward the bright brigade—
Charge for the doors ! they said—
  Pushed the six hundred.

'Forward the bright brigade,
Was there a woman stayed ?
No, though the darlings knew
  Some one had stumbled.
Their's not to pause nor stop,
Their's not to help her up,
Their's but to rush or die,
  Pushed the six hundred.

'Women to right of me,
Women to left of me,
Women in front of me,
  Oh ! how they scrambled !
Brushed onward, dame and belle !
Boldly they pushed, and well !
In through the doors at last,
Into the opera house,
  Pushed the six hundred.

'When can their glory fade ?
Oh ! the wild charge they made !
  I stood and wondered !
Shocked at the charge they made,
Blushed for the bright brigade,
  Pushing six hunderd !

"That must have been written by some one who was at the opera matinée yesterday morning," Smy says, significantly.

And under the battery of four inquisitorial eyes, that husband of mine turned as red as a blood beet! laughed a silly, mirthless laugh, said "shouldn't wonder!" and putting the parody back in his pocket, fell to making the most minute inquiries about our home life—Smy's and mine.

"Didn't we find it dull? moping there all day, without anything to do. Were we receiving many calls from our city neighbors? How would it do for us to give a dinner, by way of assuring people of our desire to be sociable."

To all of which we answered somewhat at random, for I was thinking "If there was nothing wrong about Jack's visiting the opera house, why shouldn't he have said he was there and saw the charge of the bright brigade." And Smy told me afterward, that she was thinking, if it wasn't conscious guilt that produced that vivid beet red on Jack's olive cheeks, what was it?

So you see, thanks to Mrs. Bluxom, we were all at sixes and sevens!

With his usual impetuous imperativeness, Jack insist-

ed upon a day and a list of guests to be decided on for our dinner, a dinner that any *d* of malignant meaning will describe—disastrous, dreadful, dismal.

CHAPTER IX.

A DOG, A DINING, AND A DISASTER.

THE question of how to make a very new-fashioned spring polonaise out of a very old-fashioned overskirt was the next perplexity that chased contemplation of my husband's sudden falling from grace from my surcharged soul.

For, of course, if I *had* to give that dinner I did not want to look like a dowd even in my own house. And somehow or other, even saddles and photographs did not overburden us with ready cash. I had taken my old-fashioned skirt all to pieces in the cool sitting-room back of the parlor, and it was scattered in wild disarray over the fresh white matting that was my special pride and delight, for I had bought it with my own secret earnings.

(Jack had stared and asked where it had come from when he first saw it, and I had answered vaguely, "Old

clothes," and as he knew that there was a species of metempsychosis perpetually going on with our old habiliments, whereby old dresses reappeared in the shape of butter dishes, and old shawls effloresced into fresh flowers for our hats, he accepted the fable and admired my matting.) Well, as I was about to say, I was racking my brain over that dismembered garment, when all my brain work was set at naught by Jack's sudden entrance, closely followed by a great shaggy water dog.

"Oh! John, John!" I screamed, "where did that ugly monster come from? Please drive him out, he's spoiling my matting terribly with his great dirty paws."

"Ugly monster! That's all a woman knows about dogs," says my husband, in tones of indignant reproach; "he's a perfect beauty and cheap as dirt."

"Cheap! John, you didn't buy that wretch?"

"Didn't buy him? Of course I did. You don't think I stole him, do you?"

"Oh! but John," I continue (scorning to notice his last remark), "what on earth do we want with a dog here?"

"Well, Maggie," he answers, scratching his head furiously (as is his way when ideas do not seem to germinate with facility), "I don't know that we do ex-

actly want a dog here, though the fellow I bought him of says he's a splendid yard dog; but you know we're both uncommonly fond of ducks, and I take it that when we go back home it will be much cheaper for me to shoot my own ducks, and have this fellow to fetch them out, than to pay fifty cents apiece for every one we eat. And this dog was sold to me for a number one duck dog. It's a setter, you know."

I suppose I ought to have felt perfectly happy when informed that the beast was a "setter," for Jack delivered the word as if it would prove a settler, but somehow it didn't seem to make me feel a particle better.

"He'll save his price in one season," continued John, as if arguing a point with his own conscience.

"How much did it cost?" I ask, regarding the increase to our family with unfriendly eyes.

"Fifty dollars!"

"Fifty dollars!" I repeated his words with a scream and a gasp. "I wonder how many years it will take us to eat that dog's worth of ducks?"

"Fifty dollars' worth of ducks at fifty cents apiece is not such an unheard of quantity. Besides, we'll have the ducks and the dog too, don't you see?" says Jack.

There was no gainsaying the correctness of his calcu-

lation, nor the fact that the money was gone and the dog was bought ; and if John would indulge in speculative economy I couldn't help it, but how I did wish I could turn that dog into a black silk polonaise !

I sighed resignedly and fell to work again, while Jack (evidently stung into it by remorse) made unusual efforts to forward my preparations for *that* dinner.

I was not quite sure what decided result would follow from that dinner, other than a sure deficit in our ready cash account. But Jack's word was still law, and it had to be gone through with.

(You see our idol was tottering on his pedestal, but not yet fallen.)

One would have supposed from the plethora of suggestions caused by that dinner, that a Vanderbilt was about to entertain a Stewart. But I think Jack's assiduity was altogether the result of his dog purchase.

The morning of our dining did not find me in the very best of humors, for John had insisted that the Bluxoms should be invited, and as we could not tell him why we "hated and despised" Mrs. Bluxom, we had to consent.

Jack had gone down town as usual, saying, "Saddles must be stitched if the stars fall."

Smy was making some charlotte russe in the pantry, and I, with an old green veil tied over my head, was circulating about the premises freely, duster in hand, when a ring at the bell startled me ; it was so absurdly early for city people to be coming.

I cautiously opened the front window and peeped out.

There stood a small boy with a chicken in his arms, a wild looking bird that turned its little black eyes about in the most inquisitive fashion. Opening the door to him I asked, wonderingly, "What's that?"

"Chicken cock, mum."

"But who sent it?"

"Boss sent it, mum."

I took it from him, and going straight to where Smy was up to her ears in desert preparations, I said, "Smy, look here! Jack's conscience is certainly lacerated by that dog business. He's actually sent up a chicken to help out the dinner."

"But it's too late," says Smy.

"Rather late ; but it would never do to hurt his feelings by not having it cooked. We can parboil it first, you know."

So it was consigned to the cook's charge, with instruction to parboil it first.

I don't think from the expression of my cook's face, when she took the bird from my arms, that Jack's purchase in any way exalted him in her estimation, but she was too true an artiste to slight the poorest material, so that when, finally, we were all gathered around the table, I radiant, because my made-over silk was a grand success, and Jack radiant because the table really did look creditable, a most magnificently trussed fowl forming the crowning feature of the feast.

Jack smiled approvingly at me over its well stuffed proportions, and plunging the carving fork into it, the stuffing gushed in a savory stream through the opening, rising like incense toward our grateful nostrils. The carving knife followed the fork. Its motion was slow and labored. It dawned upon me that my magnificent trussed fowl was a magnificent fraud. It was tough, villainously tough. The exertion of reducing it to slices brought great beads upon poor Jack's brow.

"My dear," he said, with a feeble company smile, "I am afraid your poultry was no fledgling."

"I am afraid," I answered (by way of joking the awkwardness of the situation away), "that you sent it up rather late; but as it was your first effort in the

caterer's line, I did not wish to discourage you by not doing our best with it."

"I sent it up! I've sent no eating chickens to-day."

I really feel ashamed of Jack's want of city polish, so I say, very blandly, "You forget, John! A small boy brought it just a little while after you went down town, and said you sent it."

With up-raised knife and fork, with pale face and eyes, full of horrified anticipations, my husband gasped, "What did he look like?"

"The boy or the chicken, dear?"

"The chicken!"

"It was a great ugly spotted cock with its comb cut like a dandy, and I can't imagine what possessed you to buy such an octogenarian for dinner."

"My pea-soup! my pea-soup!" Jack groaned, pallid with misery.

"His pea-soup! his pea-soup! What does he mean?" I asked, vaguely addressing myself to our guests, in hopes of a solution.

The ghost of a sardonic grin passed over John's miserable face, as he replied, with cutting irony, "Nothing, my dear, except that you have boiled down twenty dollars into that indigestible mass. If that game-cock had

not come to so untimely an end through your ignorance, he would have been worth his weight in gold to me. It was the greatest bargain I ever made. I was going to send him down to the plantation and be the first one to introduce the most magnificent breed of poultry there; but now—" and he sighed as he smelled at the stuffing.

I shall always feel grateful to bluff old Dr. Bluxom for the hearty, genuine, rollicking burst of laughter with which he broke the awful spell of silence that Jack's bad manners had thrown upon the group.

His example was contagious; he laughed until the tears streamed down his jolly red cheeks. Smy seconded his efforts with might and main, Mrs. Bluxom smiled (with the best intentions), Julie Pemberton cackled like a school girl; even her city-bred courtly husband joined the mirthful chorus with grave enjoyment, until finally Jack's merry, irresistible, countrified roar rose above the hubbub, and napkins and handkerchiefs did double duty in wiping streaming eyes.

In the midst of the hilarity our hired waiter, bending obsequiously over me, whispered, "Shall I serve the wine, madame? it has just arrived."

"Wine!" I say, vaguely, for I hadn't the slightest idea that any wine was contemplated at our feast, add-

ing quickly, however, "Certainly," with the nonchalant air of one who never dined without a choice of wines upon the board.

While that accomplished creature was placing glasses before my guests, I was doing a sum in mental arithmetic that made my soul sink with apprehension; adding to one fifty-dollar dog one twenty-dollar game-cock, and one wine bill, sum total unknown. We were ruined—we must go under—and all because Jack must try to do things as other people did.

He had said nothing to me about wine. I didn't know when it had come, or even what sort it was. I remembered hearing a ring at the area gate after we sat down, but as the matter was in the hands of one of the most accomplished waiters, I was content to await the dénouement.

It came very speedily.

Through the pantry door, hair on end, white and terror-stricken, our accomplished waiter dashed back into the dining-room, and crouching beside Dr. Bluxom's chair, moaned piteously, "I've got 'em again, Doctor, got 'em again—the snakes! the devils! I didn't know I was drunk!"

Consternation seized the group. Jack rose in his wrath ; so did Dr. Bluxom.

"You scamp you!" the latter cried ; "didn't I tell you the last time I brought you through that if you didn't stop drinking you'd have it again, and I'd let you alone next time ?"

"Indeed! indeed!" moaned the wretch, "I didn't know I was drunk. Oh! doctor! I didn't, indeed!"

But Jack cut short his appeal by a vigorous gripe upon his collar, and dragged the victim of delirium tremens (as was supposed) to the front door, assisted by a rear shove movement by Dr. Bluxom, which soon landed our accomplished assistant in the street, minus hat, coat and reputation.

A shriek from Mrs. Bluxom diverted our attention from the ejected waiter to the doctor's wife.

She was clasping the sides of her skirts with clinched hands, and rending the air with her shrieks. "A rat! a rat!" she screamed, and darted straight for the pantry door that the man had left open.

Smy and I and Julie Pemberton followed her, but by the time we got there she was dancing a war dance in the midst of my best crockery, and had grown altogether incoherent in her statements. In a minute Julie Pem-

berton also showed signs of lunacy, and gathering her skirts tightly about her little feet, sprang recklessly on to the table where Smy's charlotte russe stood awaiting its début, shrieking, "Alligators! alligators! oh! Mr. Pemberton, Dr. Bluxom, Mr. Walton! for God's sake, somebody, quick!"

An open champagne basket, lined with wet moss, standing under a shelf, explained the mystery. Smy's alligators had come while we were at dinner! They had been shipped in an old champagne basket for the benefit of a free circulation of air, packed in wet Spanish moss. The champagne basket had been supposed by our accomplished waiter to mean champagne. His terror on cutting the strings and liberating the unknown monsters had resulted as we have seen.

Rejoicing in their freedom, the alligators were crawling about on tours of investigation, and while all eyes had been riveted on the scene of the waiter's ejectment, one of the reptiles had found its way under Mrs. Bluxom's flounces (no doubt, with the best intentions in the world). Hence, excitement number three.

A couple of pairs of tongs with which the gentlemen secured Smy's "pets," and returned them to their basket, a laughing explanation on that young lady's part

of "how she did miss the dear old alligators so much, that she had determined to try to get them introduced into the zoölogical gardens; that they had come while we were at dinner, and been mistaken for champagne bottles by the waiter," once more restored an outward semblance of order. But—

Beyond the fact that Mrs. Bluxom took mortal offence and declared it was all a "put up job on the part of those country creatures whom she did try so hard to civilize," and never came near us after that day, I cannot say that any good result was ever apparent from *that dinner!*

CHAPTER X.

"HOW SOON WE ARE FORGOT!"

JACK'S slouch hat and cutaway coat had barely disappeared from view the morning after our memorable dinner, when Smy sprang to her feet with sparkling eyes (radiant at the prospect of helping along once more), and said, "Now, I'm going straight to Dr. Wagner's with my alligators! I've engaged Bet's husband

to carry the basket for me." (Bet was our cook.) Then she ran off in great glee to equip for her walk.

When she was ready to start she found me already equipped, standing in the front door, tying my hat-strings under my chin with an air of defiant determination.

"Where might you be going, m'am?" she asked, with a pert drawl.

"I *might* be going to the moon—I *am* going to Dr. Wagner's."

"What for?"

"To chaperon you; at least to reconnoitre before I allow you to enter into any sort of arrangement with that queer old man."

"Queer old man! Why, Madge, you know everybody we've asked about him says he is an eccentric scientific man, with a noble head and a noble heart for the right sort of people."

"Of course, you're the right sort of people, Smy," I answer; "nevertheless, I consider it to be my duty to chaperon you on this occasion."

"You absurd thing. Do you forget I'm your senior by four years?"

"A married woman is every unmarried woman's senior," I say, with dignity; "so no more at present."

I was glad afterwards, for my own sake as well as Smy's, that I had gone. My visit to old Dr. Wagner's, on that sweet fresh spring morning is stamped upon my memory like a rare old cameo in strong relief.

Accompanied by Bet's husband, the champagne basket and the alligators, we proceeded to the fine old mansion that Smy had so unceremoniously invaded on her first visit.

We rang decorously this time, and were admitted decorously by a reverend looking man-servant who, from his devout visage and speckless suit of black, might readily have been mistaken for a theological student.

"Dr. Wagner would be in presently; would the ladies please be seated?"

He seated us and left us, and Smy designated the different points of interest about the queer old room with the point of her parasol, to beguile our loneliness.

It was all very grand, gloomy and peculiar, but I got tired presently of staring at the dusty old books, and the jars of creeping things, and was seriously meditating advising a retreat, when the back door to the room was opened, and in came Smy's doctor, leaning on

the arm of a little old lady, so dainty and white and refined looking that she might have stepped out of a last century's portrait frame.

She greeted us with the softest little smile, and bending slightly toward the ear-trumpet which her husband held up in an inquiring position, said quietly, "Two young ladies, husband, to see you, I guess?"

Smy then advanced and said through the trumpet, "I've come, sir!"

"You've come! So I see! But who are you, and what did you come for? and who's she? and what did she come for?" he growled, like an enraged old bear.

"Be patient with him, dears, please," said the patient little wife by his side; "he's been terribly put out this morning; but you know men of genius must be allowed their eccentricities" (this with a little air of pride becoming the consort of *such* a genius).

But Smy's reply smacked more of impudence than patience. "I've come because you told me to, sir, and she's come because she chose to come with me. I'm the alligator girl. How soon we are 'forgot!'" she added, turning with comic distress to me.

"The alligator girl! Bless my soul!" and down went the trumpet on the floor, as he held out both

hands in rapturous greeting, one to Smy and one to me. "And have the alligators come too?"

"Here they are, sir. Didn't I tell you I'd have them here within a month?"

"Of course you did; but what did that amount to? Don't people tell me things and promise me things every hour of the day, that never come to anything?"

"City people, maybe, but not country folks."

"Yes, yes," he said, "you're right; stand up for the country. God made the country and the devil made the towns. Wife! here's a greater curiosity than the alligators—a girl that can keep a promise and write a decent hand."

"My dear," says the doctor's wife, gratefully extending towards Smy an exquisite bunch of heliotrope, mignonette, white rose-buds and geranium leaves she had been holding all this while in her small withered white hand, "you have made my dear husband smile for the first time in weeks. I thank you for it. Your merry saucy ways do him good. People generally are so afraid of him that he sees only their worst and stupidest side. Don't you be afraid of him, his heart is as gentle as a lamb."

"What's she saying about me?" growled the doctor;

"she's always taking advantage of my deafness to backbite me."

"She was just telling me that stupid timid people held to the notion that you indulged secretly in cannibal practices and devoured people who offended you, but I hope before I offend you, you will have acquired such a fondness for an unmixed alligator diet, that I will prove no temptation to you personally," says little Dauntless (which was another of Smy's pet names).

A dry chuckle and a volcanic heaving of the old doctor's broad chest testified to his appreciation of the retort.

"When are you going back to the country?" he asked, presently. "I want you to go back before you're spoiled."

"Oh! not for a long time I'm afraid," says Smy, sadly. "We're poor, desperately poor; don't you remember I told you I was looking for something to do? I want to help my brother. He's a broken up or a broken down Southern planter; that's his wife, and he's gone to stitching saddles for a living. I promised to bring you some alligators and you promised to help me keep my head above water. I've kept my promise."

"And we'll keep ours, wife, wont we?" he said,

stooping with boyish delight to peep at the imprisoned alligators; "we're going to make her our little secretary, aren't we?"

He was in high good humor now, and his inward content was reflected in mild rays of satisfaction from the gentle blue eyes of his consort as she answered, "I hope we can, dears (addressing her remarks to us both), he has been so annoyed and inconvenienced by the irregularities of the young men he has tried, that he declared he would never have another secretary. But the other day, after *you*, dear (nodding to Smy) left, he showed me your pretty handwriting, and said if he could get a secretary to write like that for him he would pay her fifty dollars a month, to assist him from ten until two o'clock every day."

"What does she say, wife?" asks the doctor, who, with the assistance of the reverend man-servant, was bustling about with his alligators.

"What shall I tell him, my dear?"

"What do you say, Maggie?"

"I think it a good thing."

"How do I know he wont fall out with me as he did with the others?" asks Smy.

"The others were young men, dear," says the little

old lady, demurely, "too much given to the vices of their sex and their age to conform to the doctor's (perhaps) rigid requirements. All but dear Jamie, and there even I cannot hold my husband blameless."

"What did dear Jamie do?" asks Smy, eagerly.

"He only smoked. But he was a splendid fellow, my own nephew, and I rather believe the doctor himself regrets his own conduct towards him."

"She's telling you about Jamie," says the doctor, who seemed to be able to understand his wife simply from the motion of her lips.

"Yes!" Smy nodded to him.

"But you? are you going to be my little right-hand man or not? I want you, child! It will be like a sunbeam let into a graveyard, wont it wife? Make her say 'yes.'"

"Say 'yes,' dear." It is impossible to describe the softness of that ancient dame's voice, eyes and manners.

Smy marched up to the doctor and presented his trumpet in a challenging fashion.

He took it with an indulgent smile and bent his magnificent head to hear what she had to say.

"I'd like to say 'yes,' but I'm afraid. Supposing you get cross with me, and frighten me so I can't write.

And suppose 'dear Jamie' comes back repentant and wants his place again. He didn't do anything but smoke, and I wouldn't give a fig for a man who couldn't stand a good cigar."

"He'll never come back," says the old man, sadly; "he's proud as Lucifer, and I made him mad, didn't I, wife?"

"Jamie's hot tempered but not sulky," she said, cheerfully. "He's out of town just now, but I know he'll come right here as soon as he gets back."

"In the country," says Smy, roguishly, "since 'freedom' (as the darkies call it) we are in the habit of wasting a great deal of time and paper making contracts with the freedmen at the beginnnig of each crop year. The contract doesn't in the least bind anybody; but it makes the freedman feel better to be able to say that 'worn't in de contrac.' Now, if I'm to be your secretary, you're to sign a contract not 'to frighten, scold, scare or otherwise intimidate me,' the party of the second part, and I will sign a contract 'to do good and cheerful service for you,' the party of the first part."

"What do you call that sprite?" says the old doctor,

addressing me individually for the first time, then his eyes quickly reverted to Smy's lovely saucy face.

"We call her all sorts of things," I answered. "Eleanor, Sunbeam, Smy, Little Dauntless, Miss Independence, etc. But her sponsors in baptism called her Eleanor Walton."

"Oh! Madge! my sponsors had nothing whatever to do with the 'Walton.'"

"Little Dauntless," the old man said, softly, "I like that best. May I call you Little Dauntless, child?"

"Yes, sir," says Smy, as simply as a little child.

"And you'll come and write for me every day from ten until two?"

"Yes, sir, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless your nephew should want his place back."

"Never mind my nephew; we'll take care of him, wont we, wife?"

"Yes," purred the little lady, "we'll always take care of dear Jamie."

"Then I'm your secretary, Dr. Wagner," and Smy puts her little hand into the doctor's great shaggy paw, by way of sealing their contract.

"I always made it a rule to see that the doctor's sec-

retaries had their lunch with me, dears, before going down town again. I always fancied I might be doing a little towards keeping them out of temptation that way. Luncheon is ready now, I expect. You, my dears, must stay and have a dish of early strawberries with us," says Mrs. Wagner, with charming näiveté.

Smy smiled demurely at the idea of keeping us out of temptation, but we did not refuse those early strawberries.

CHAPTER XI.

INVISIBLE CROSSES.

"'Smy opinion that 'there is something rotten in the state of Denmark.' Here, just as my secretaryship, and your colorship, and Jack's saddlership are beginning to make us so easy financially, that we need not faint at the prospect of having to tell Jack the flour barrel is empty, nor lie awake of nights trembling in anticipation of a morning call from the gas man, we all begin to mope like three sick owls. Perhaps we're not religious enough, and our consciences are suffering from a sort of irruption that will come to the surface presently like

a kind of moral measles," says Smy, one lovely Sunday morning in that sweet spring time.

Nonsensically as she put it, there was a germ of sad truth in her assertion.

Jack's conduct had become more and more incomprehensible, his arrivals and departures from home were altogether erratic and scornfully contemptuous of fixed hours. Added to which, in the last few days a strange moroseness seemed to have taken possession of him and an irritability (altogether foreign to his bright easy nature), which (most strange of all) seemed to seek a vent upon *me*, me exclusively—his doating wife, who had never willingly crossed him since the hour when she had gladly promised to love him and obey him until death did them part. He would treat Smy with all the old brotherly kindness in his very darkest moods, and turn upon me with a sort of repressed savagery that was as amazing as it was hard to bear.

So, of course I moped, and he moped, and Smy moped, because the dear thing suffered as much for me as she could have done for herself.

The church bells were ringing their solemn invitations to worship from every steeple in the city, groups of prettily dressed children clattered by on their way to "Old

Trinity." A slow but steady stream of church goers filed past in Sunday dress and Sunday mien, but still Jack paced moodily up and down on the sidewalk in front of our door, smoking his cigar with gloomy disregard of the day or its requirements, while Smy and I listlessly wondered what we had best do with the long dull hours of our idleness.

Living all our lives on a plantation, where the occasional visitation of a minister was all we knew of divine privileges, had made us too indifferent, maybe, to the opportunities for church going which we now possessed.

"Let's go to church," says Smy.

"Well, but Jack?"

"We'll take him;" and calling to him eagerly, she asked him coaxingly to "take us to church." Somewhat to my surprise, he consented, saying, as he passed *me* on his way to get ready, that "he thought some of us were sadly in need of prayer and exhortation." So we went.

As we passed up the softly carpeted aisle, in the midst of a solemn hush, the last notes of the organ prelude still quivering on the scented air, my soul was attuned to the worship of God in all humility, and when in the progress of the incomparably beautiful Episcopal

service the choir intoned the solemn response, "Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law," I knew that my heart was full of good and holy desires to keep His laws, and I believe that dear Smy's and poor Jack's were too, for the peace that passeth all understanding seemed to have smoothed the furrows from their brows and left them in a placidly receptive frame of mind.

(If only that service could stand upon its own grand merits! If only after it has wrought poor, miserable sinners into a state of exaltation that borders on the sublime of self-knowledge, the "services of the day" could be pronounced complete, and they could steal away to their closets humbled by the reminder that "there is no health in them," fresh from the petition that "He would incline their hearts to keep His laws," softened by the fellowship of "humble and contrite hearts," what an ineffable boon the world would find it.) But after the last tremulous wail of the organ had died in space, after the last silken rustle had subsided, the minister arose, and informing us twice, slowly and impressively (for not to be able to tell the text when you get home is the unpardonable sin in well regulated families), "that his text could be found in 2 Chronicles

xxxv. 9," he furthermore informed us that "Cononiah also, and Shemaiah and Nethaneel, his brethren, and Hashabiah and Jeiel, and Jozabad, chief of the Levites, gave unto the Levites for passover offerings, five thousand small cattle and five hundred oxen," which ruined me for the day. All my tender reveries, all my communings with my conscience, all my desire for a more rigid self-examination were engulfed in a sea of weariness as I yawned through that prosy marplot of a sermon.

"What did you think of the sermon?" Smy asks, addressing herself to Jack, as we walk homeward.

"Beastly!"

"Oh, John!"

"Wasn't it all about calves and cows? and aren't they beasts? At least I suppose he meant calves by small cattle."

"I wonder," I say, "why ministers will persist in hurling dreary abstractions at us? Why couldn't he have preached a warm, loving, living appeal to our natures, to strengthen us in all good and warn us off rocks of evil?" for I *had* hoped that Jack's secret vices might have been pinched by the preacher.

"I'm ashamed to say," says Smy, "that I found my-

self thinking of those Alderneys Mr. Stedman wrote about last week."

But Jack said nothing, although we had no reason to believe that he had derived any benefit from learning how many small cattle and oxen Jozabad gave unto the Levites.

Whenever things got out of gear with us at home it was Smy who promptly assumed the rôle of adjuster and universal rectifier, and just now she wore the air of a surgeon who has to probe for the diseased spot before he can apply his cure.

The heaviness of a warm Sunday afternoon was upon us. We always had a slight and early dinner on that day, for, although not really good, religious folks, we laid claim to a certain kindliness of disposition that inclined us towards making Betsy's duties as light and her "Sunday outing" as long as possible. We had watched her go through the area gate, rigid in her "Sunday bests," her honest face shining with soap and pleasure, and had turned our attention towards that object of love and anxiety, Jack!

He had stretched himself at full length on the sitting-room sofa and spread his handkerchief over his face, and gone to sleep. The streets looked lonely and deserted.

You could hear a footfall and the click of a cane a long way off. The flies that crept stealthily over the window panes buzzed with Sabbath-day distinctness. I was halting between a commendable mental drift towards "Clarke's Commentaries" and a sinful desire to finish "Middlemarch."

"Clarke's Commentaries" I felt to be the correct thing; "Middlemarch" I knew to be the most desirable thing. Smy cut the gordian knot of my scruples with, "Madge, may I read out loud to you? I've just found something that pleases me so much!"

"What in?"

"The *Sunday Times*. It is called 'Invisible Crosses,' and is real good Sunday reading."

"Very well," I say. "I was thinking of 'Clarke's Commentaries,' but one thing is as good as another to put one to sleep."

"Small encouragement, but if I waited for great encouragement how weary I should be," says my sister-in-law, and then she read:

"'Footsore and wayworn, a pilgrim paused on his journey, for the heat and burden of the day were heavy upon him, and he would fain find temporary rest for his jaded body and weary soul. He threw himself down on

the road-side with a gesture of impatient despair, as if he would thereby make one more struggle to free his stooping shoulders from the burden of a cross, invisible to other eyes, whose leaden weight was galling his worn flesh beyond the limits of finite endurance.

"'Dreary was the road by which he had travelled; dreary was the spot whereon he had selected to rest; dreary was the prospect looming up before him. Hot and white and dry stretched the road, gleaming like the sands of the desert under a sun that burned in fiery wrath rather than genial warmth. No flowers grew in this unfriendly soil; naught but sharp thorns and stinging nettles flourished thereon, for this was Sorrow's highway, and nothing that was young or bright or fresh or beautiful found a place there. All the wayfarers upon this road were pilgrims, care-worn and heavy burdened, bending beneath the weight of heavy crosses; crosses that they were doomed to bear until a pitying Father should deem fit to grant them rest within the friendly portals of the tomb.'"

Here, for some reason, Smy found it necessary to say to me, in a very emphatic voice, keeping her place with her finger and looking reproachful daggers at me, "It is an allegory, Madge, and one with a splendid moral, too."

"Beautiful!" I say with sleepy acquiescence, and once more resume the comfortable posture she had startled me out of.

"'As Pilgrim lay prone upon the road-side, gazing idly backward'—Mag, are you listening?"

"Very. Go—on."

"'On the pathway he had traversed, he saw that it was—the cross of distrust—if one has a cross to bear through life, let him bear it bravely—He gave his angels charge concerning me—Nay, brother, speak not so'—"

"Did Jack speak?" I ask, starting bolt upright, and staring at Smy with eyes defiantly stretched, as if daring her to assert that they had slumbered or slept.

She scorned to notice my weak subterfuge, but read on determinedly:

"'I journey toward the River of Life. Its bright waters flow peacefully on beyond yonder dark and sombre wood; and when I reach that happy shore I will lave me in its pure waters, and enter into rest eternal. Then Pilgrim, gathering up his scrip and his staff, started once more upon his journey, saying within himself, 'This, then, is the true way to bear life's cross. I will keep in view this gentle guide, and mayhap by following closely in her brave, patient footsteps I too may

come to see the gates ajar—I too may lave me in the waters of the River of Life.'"

"Beautiful!" I exclaim with wide-awake enthusiasm, "but slightly disconnected in parts, was it not?"

"You will find the missing links in dreamland," says Smy, with cutting sarcasm, as she folds up her paper and puts Pilgrim into the table-drawer.

And to this day she persists in saying that all I ever heard of the allegory called "Invisible Crosses" was what I caught between snores.

Snore, indeed. If I thought I ever had snored, or ever could snore, I could never look Jack in the face again.

CHAPTER XII.

OUR COMEDY OF ERRORS.

Soon after this something happened which jarred my nerves so painfully at the time, that if it had not been for Smy's inveterate habit of confiding the day's doings to a diary every night before retiring, our comedy of errors (as we *now* call it) would never have been preserved in its full proportions of tragic absurdity.

With Smy's permission, I will give her own version of that affair, just to show you what an amount of misery can be manufactured out of nothing by an active imagination.

"MAY 16, 1870.

"This has been a day of horrors! But, as 'all is well that ends well,' I can tell about it in a tolerably placid frame of mind. Though to you, my diary, I will confess that anger against Jack, dear, stupid, half-killed Jack, and admiration for the manly conduct, superb figure, and splendid eyes of Mr. James Cuthbert (Mrs. Wagner's 'dear Jamie'), are still making a lively commotion somewhere within my anatomy, whether in head, or heart, or both, is 'nobody's business.'

"Well, to begin at the beginning (which Madge, poor dear, precious, says I never do), I was sitting quietly at at my desk in Dr. Wagner's office, copying pages of what *he* calls writing, but which I tell him are the foot-tracks of the ghosts of murdered reptiles and alligators sacrificed by him on the altar of science, when the quiet of the room was broken by a hasty ringing footfall altogether unfamiliar to me, but which made my old doctor's face fairly glow with pleasure.

"'Ah! boy, you're back, are you?'" he said, in such a glad, glad voice.

"'Yes, sir,' I heard somebody answer, in a voice that seemed shaken by haste or agitation; then after wringing Dr. Wagner's hand warmly he said, 'As usual, uncle, I've come to you with a petition, but not for myself this time. I got back to the city yesterday morning, and intended coming straightway to you and aunt—'

("Here my heart gave a great thump, for this then was the Jamie who had probably come back to rob me of my cozy place. I stole a look at him. He didn't in the least look like a robber; he was a tall, broad-shouldered, bearded young man, with a fascinating smile and such a glorious pair of brown eyes.)

—"'but was prevented by the most remarkable occurrence. Of course I went to my old rooms; had scarcely been there half an hour—not long enough to take a bath and freshen up a little from my journey—when a card was brought to my room with a name scrawled on it in pencil marks, and a request for a private interview. I told the waiter to show the gentleman to my room. He came back almost immediately, and at his heels strode a man about my own age. A tall splendid young savage, who marched up to me without a word of preparation and accused me in the fiercest manner of having staid out of town to avoid him. I took the liberty of telling

him he was either a fool or a madman, that as I had never seen him before, and could not even now say what his name was, it was hardly likely I had any cause for avoiding him. Upon which he thrust a photograph under my nose and asked me if that 'was my picture?' I told him it undoubtedly was, and asked to know how he came in possession of it. My question seemed to arouse him to a perfect frenzy of insane rage. He tore the picture to ribbons, and striding towards me drew his glove most insultingly across my face. I've only bored you with this much to show you that it was utterly impossible to get rid of the fellow without promising him 'satisfaction.' I gave it to him this morning in the shape of a broken arm. I purposely aimed at the hand that had so causelessly insulted me. I did everything in a man's power to convince him that he had nothing against me; but for every word I spoke I received a fresh insult.'

"Here Dr. Wagner interrupted him with an impatient 'Well, what have I got to do with all your boy's nonsense? You say you haven't hurt the fool.'

"'No, sir; but I verily believe that man is a lunatic, and I reproach myself with permitting myself to meet him. I wish you would go to see him for me, uncle; I

would thank you so much. I've since heard he has a lovely young wife.'

"'But the devil and Tom Walker! You say you don't even know the the idiot's name!'

"'I've found that out too. It is Walton, John something or other Walton. He's recently from the country.'

"Up to that moment he had no suspicions of my presence, for the doctor's jars and books and things completely hid me from view. But then I darted at him in a tigerish way, screaming 'It's my brother! my brother! my poor, dear, precious Jack that you've killed!'

"He started with a frightened look, raised his hat and said, in the gentlest voice, 'Rest easy, young lady, your brother is not in the slightest danger. He will only suffer a little while, and be confined to his room long enough to reflect on his own remarkable conduct. I assure you he forced this thing upon me. But to find he is your brother makes the whole matter more than ever to be regretted.'

"'If it's Little Dauntless's brother I'll take time to see him,' said my dear old doctor, bustling around for his hat and cane. 'But you've got to come too, sir; I'm going to see you two young fools through with it.'

"So calling a hack, Mr. Cuthbert put me and his uncle into it, and first asking me if it was *my* wish that he should accompany us, then got in and gave the man my directions for finding our house.

("I told him that I wanted him to go with us, for there was certainly some strange misunderstanding in the matter that could not be cleared up without him.)

"Of course we found everything in confusion at home. Dr. Bluxom was there and the scatter-brains who had acted as Jack's second. We found Madge, pale, white and quiet, sitting alone in the sitting-room.

"'He is losing his mind, Smy,' she said, when I'd got my arms around her neck; 'he wont let me come near him.'

"'Doubt if he had any to lose,' said old Dr. Wagner, which was the first Madge knew of his presence. She flushed angrily, and turning upon him she was covered with confusion when she saw Mr. Cuthbert standing there, looking so wretched, so handsome, and so manly.

"'Madame,' he said, coming bravely forward and standing before poor little Maggie with his bare head bowed humbly, 'I am the unhappy instrument of your present suffering. God knows that I have never injured your husband before this morning, by word, thought, or

deed. He forced me into this thing. Physically his injuries amount to nothing. My uncle has come to see if his great professional knowledge can avail aught in case your fears of his sanity, which I confess to sharing, should prove correct. Will you take him to your husband? And will you tell me that you pardon me for my share in this miserable business?'

"Politeness required that Madge should look at him to reply. Suddenly I saw her face light up as if she had found something she had long been searching for in vain. Her eyes seemed glued to the handsome, embarrassed face before her. Suddenly she asked, 'Sir, have you had any pictures taken by Cassoni lately?'

"'I have, madame.'

"'And colored?'

"'And colored.'

"'Have you received them?'

"'All but one. He wrote me one had been lost, and would have to be replaced.'

"'Oh! you stupid, stupid Jack, how could you—how dared you think such a thing of me?' Maggie moaned, covering her red-hot face with her poor little trembling hands.

"'I know what she means,' I cried, jumping up in a

regular eureka excitement. 'Maggie and I have been trying to help that stupid boy up-stairs without his knowledge. She colored photographs, and I wrote for the dearest old Dr. Wagner in the world. I remember now hearing her complain that a photograph she had left in her desk while she went down stairs to see a visitor had mysteriously disappeared, and she would have to make it good to Cassoni. She never told me what the picture was like, for of course Cassoni's pictures were to her just so many eyes, noses and cheeks, to have so much blue, brown, or red laid on at so much a daub. But I solemnly believe that Jack is the thief who stole that photograph, and then had to hunt up the original to insult him. The idea of his daring to think wrong of Madge. And you! What do you—what can you—what will you think of the whole Walton family?' I asked, turning suddenly upon Mr. Cuthbert.

"'I shall reserve the privilege of answering that question at some future day,' he answered, with a quiet smile. 'In the meantime I should like very much to have my uncle see Mr. Walton.'

"'Come, Little Dauntless, let's hunt this trigger-man up. Genuine specimens of your Southern chivalry are becoming so rare that in case Jamie's hurt him worse

than he thinks for I'll spare no expense to preserve him in spirits of first proof,' with which the heartless old Dr. Wagner shuffled up-stairs, trumpet in hand, chuckling over his own monstrous joke, or something else."

CHAPTER XIII.

CASTING OUT DEVILS.

NOT the sort of devils that entered into that unoffending herd of scriptural swine, and caused them to run violently down a steep place into the sea and perish in its waters, but the devils of distrust, and suspicion, and gloom, and all uncharitableness that Jack and I were possessed of.

It was no more possible for me to sit still down stairs, talking polite commonplace with Dr. Wagner's nephew, while Smy and the doctor were up-stairs torturing that poor husband of mine, than it would have been possible for Mrs. Bluxom to mind her own business.

Mr. Cuthbert had made a motion to leave when the others had gone up-stairs, but I had detained him, knowing full well that when everything was explained

Jack would know no rest until he had apologized in person to his late antagonist.

But I wanted to be *in* at the casting out of the devils that had come so near making an end of our domestic felicity, so I asked Mr. Cuthbert if he would mind if I went up stairs too, and as he said "he shouldn't in the least mind," and smiled into my anxious face with that gravely appreciative smile of his, and I knew that he knew just exactly how I felt.

(*En passant*, wouldn't it be delightful if Jack's stupidity should be the means of bringing *such* a man within scope of our darling Eleanor's fascinations. Mercy! I believe I'm making a gun-shot wound in my husband's arm occasion for congratulation! From all evil and sinful desires good Lord deliver us.)

As I reached my room door I heard Dr. Wagner say, magisterially, "Your wound, as you're pleased to call it, sir, is nothing but a pin scratch; won't keep you in the house, sir, long enough to teach you a little sense. Ought to be indicted for larceny, sir! Yes, larceny! Needn't stare at me that way! You've been stealing! Yes, sir, stealing, and your rascalities are at the bottom of all this muddle! Ought to be indicted, sir! Yes, sir, indicted!"

"Eleanor!" says Jack, savagely, "you introduced that gentlemen as a friend of yours. Oblige me by conducting your friend to the front door before I try my one sound fist on him."

"But he's right, Jack; right in every word. You've been behaving abominably, and now, since I know you're not really hurt, I don't care how much my doctor abuses you."

"Have my own family turned against me?" says poor Jack, staring incredulously at Smy's defiant face.

"Your own family ought to," says Smy. "How have you treated our darling Madge? the best wife a man ever had."

"The best wife a man ever had; yes, I grant you she was before she came to this accursed city. But didn't I see her bending over a man's photograph, that fellow's that gave me this broken arm? Didn't I hear her murmur, 'too dear, too dear, but I can't help it,' to that picture? Didn't Mrs. Bluxom tell me that she considered it to be her duty to tell me that my wife was continually on the go, and that a small boy was perpetually coming here with letters, which she always received with her own hands, while I, poor fool, was away from home spending every moment of my time trying to—"

"Settle dog fights," says Smy, tauntingly.

"What?"

"And visiting the cock-pit!"

"Which?"

"And going to opera matinées with women who weren't your wife nor your sister neither," pursues my merciless little advocate.

"Eleanor!"

"And going to saloons at mid-day."

"Sister!"

"Didn't Mrs. Bluxom tell us so, and was Mrs. Bluxom ever known to be mistaken? She's a woman of the best intentions."

John seemed literally struck speechless. Smy stood before him with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks; Dr. Wagner was making my big rocking-chair creak with his volcanic chuckling.

"Give it to him, Little Dauntless," he cried, rapping the arm of his chair with the trumpet he'd been holding to his ear all this while (although it was only at times of studious abstraction that his deafness was extreme).

"Sir, may I inquire why you persist in thrusting yourself into matters that don't concern you?" shouted

Jack. "My sister informed me that you were totally deaf. Under that belief I've said things meant for no ears but hers."

"Never mind my ears," says the doctor; "they're not quite as long as yours, but my bray's as strong. It was my nephew you assaulted, sir, and I'm here in his name, sir."

"Smy," I say, stepping into the room, "this has gone far enough. Jack, did you really hear me say 'too dear, too dear,' to Mr. Cuthbert's picture?" I ask.

"I really did, madame" (stiff as a poker).

"Well, don't you agree with me, that eight dollars a dozen *is* an outrageous price for cabinet portraits? But *I can't help it*, for Cassoni sets the price. And you stole Mr. Cuthbert's picture from my desk, and I had to pay Cassoni for it, and I don't think it was kind or gentlemanly."

"Is everybody going crazy?" asks Jack, staring round in a dazed fashion.

"I'm here professionally to pass sentence on your case, sir, but I've heard no complaint of lunacy entered against the females of your family. No, sir, none," says the doctor.

"John," I say, "maybe I did wrong to keep it a

secret from you, but you know you're so full of foolish prejudices against women doing anything, that I had to do it secretly or sit still with idly folded hands and see you 'go under.' I've been coloring photographs for Cassoni for ever so long, and he pays me splendidly, but sometimes I do think some of the pictures are *too dear*, as in the case of Mr. Cuthbert's. And Smy has been copying for Dr. Wagner, and he pays her splendidly; and as for Mrs. Bluxom, I am utterly indignant that you should have listened to her. I have been on the go (to Cassoni's), and very frequently he has sent his little errand boy with envelopes full of 'cartes,' which I've always received with my own hands. But, oh! Jack, to think you could stoop to play the spy on me."

"Yes, you," says Smy, maliciously, "with matinées and dog fights, and saloon visits and cock-pits weighing on your conscience and on our spirits, and which, permit me to remind you, are still unaccounted for."

"Girls," says Jack, looking beseechingly from one to the other of us, "did you really think I was going to the dogs at that gait?"

"Mrs. Bluxom told us you were. Besides, we *saw* you at the matinée with a strange woman."

"Did you see her face?" he asked, the old gleam of mischief dancing back into his eyes.

"No; but she was superbly dressed," I answer.

Here Jack fell to laughing, forgetful of his bandaged arm, until a sudden "ouch!" reminded him and us of his hurt.

"Girls," he says, "possess your souls in peace. That superbly dressed individual is about sixty years old, as ugly as the devil, and cross as that gentleman's wife."

"What were you escorting her about for then?"

"I was interviewing her."

"Inter—what, Jack?"

"Interviewing her. I found the saddles didn't keep me busy all the while, so I turned reporter for the *Times*, and had to dodge about at all sorts of times and into all sorts of places. That lady was a celebrated litigant, and I was trying to make an 'item' out of her. Oh! my—and Mopsy (that was one of Jack's pet names for me), all the this while we've been playing the goose."

"Speak for yourself, John."

"Come to my arms, or arm, rather—deuce take your 'too dear' man."

"I expect he thought the deuce had taken him when you charged at him in your crazy fashion. But really,

Eleanor, one of us ought to go back down stairs. We're treating the doctor's nephew with most unpardonable rudeness."

"The doctor's nephew! Who is he? Another one of the actors in this comedy of errors?" Jack asks.

"He's the hero, or the victim, or the participant of your stupidity," says Smy, "who rationally concluded that he had disabled a crazy man, and magnanimously besought his uncle, my dear old Dr. Wagner, sitting there laughing at us all in his sleeve (with a saucy nod to the doctor), to come and examine your empty sleeve and empty head. And he's down stairs now, John, waiting for his uncle. And he's very miserable and very splendid, and—"

"Will somebody oblige me," says my husband, "by inviting that young man up-stairs? I think if I could induce him to tell me once more that I was either a fool or a lunatic, I should sleep the better for it to-night."

Somebody obliged him, and young "Jamie" came, and took poor Jack's left hand in both his with such a brotherly warmth, and said so many handsome and manly things, in such a handsome and manly way, that we all fell in love with him on the spot. Of course I do not include Smy in that assertion.

CHAPTER XIV.

SACRED CROCODILES.

CONSIDERING the inauspicious character of his introduction to our family, it was really astonishing what an interest Mr. Cuthbert continued to take in the "case."

When he went away he asked for permission to come again, to "see about Jack's arm." Of course, it was accorded him.

Presently flowers and books and music and fruits began to find their way to our house, with "Mr. Cuthbert's compliments."

Then it began to be a regular thing for Mr. Cuthbert to spend his evenings with us.

The last bouquet that came was the cause of much confusion (in Smy's cheeks).

"For me?" asked our convalescing savage, of Mr. Cuthbert's messenger.

"Yes, sir; leastways, sir, I 'sposes so."

"Well, young man, say to your master, that I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for the flowers, but my

arm's knitting so rapidly that I think I could venture on an oyster diet or a lobster salad beneficially, if it's all the same to him."

Mr. Cuthbert came himself that evening, and when Jack asked if his message had been received, he replied, Yankee fashion, by asking another question, and wanted to know if Jack "really believed he had been casting his pearls before swine? Of course his flowers had been meant for the ladies, his inquires only for himself."

Somehow or other Jack's free and easiness seemed to precipitate matters, for as he still retired early, and as I had to see to his arm for him, I was compelled to leave the doctor's nephew and my sister-in-law together a while.

When I left the parlor they were talking about "Ristori," Smy sitting on the piano stool, and Mr. Cuthbert at the opposite end of our little drawing-room. When I came back they were talking about George Elliot, with a suspiciously small space of sofa between them.

But that night my darling little sister put her arms around my neck, and with a great show of secresy, and very pink cheeks, told me what I knew very well all along, that—"Jamie loved her."

Jack's complete restoration was celebrated by a grand dinner, served in grand style, in Dr. Wagner's grand old mansion.

The toasts were all of the doctor's own proposing, and were three in number.

First of all he called on us to drink a bumper to "Little Dauntless—might she never be one whit less bright, nor honest, nor plucky than now!"

The second was to the "trigger man and his forgiving wife."

The third to "the mad dog, the alligators, and to Jamie, who had all been instrumental in giving them (his and Mrs. Wagner) a sunbeam (Smy) to warm the shady downward slope of life's steep hill."

Upon which Smy proposed "blessings on his frosty prow!"

Upon which again gentle little Mrs. Wagner wiped a teardrop from her mild blue eye, with the softest bit of cambric.

And Jack, who was determined to show what he knew about "John Anderson my Jo," "hoped it might be a thousand years before our dear host and hostess should 'sleep together at the foot!'"

Which made me feel like proposing, "I would not live alway," but I didn't.

Altogether it was a delicious day, unmarred by any of the untoward accidents that had made *my dinner* a thing of horrors and a joke forever, or, by Mrs. Bluxom's presence.

Whether Smy continued to write for Dr. Wagner and I to color for Cassoni, and Jack to stitch saddles until the place was out of debt; whether Smy and Mr. Cuthbert got married right off or waited until we went home to the place of her fathers; whether aunt Drew and uncle Phil, and all the rest of our kith and kin, pointed the finger of scorn at the return of the innocents, or bedewed them with tears of welcome, and pronounced them three brave, plucky, independent young souls; whether the sweet June roses nodded their pretty heads in glad welcome to me when I got back to my dear old garden; whether the mocking-birds sang me to sleep with heavenly melodies that first happy night at home, is everybody's business, and I give them a comprehensive "yes," if it will fit everywhere.

Why Smy's husband, when he and she come out of the hot city in the summer months to rusticate at the plantation, shows such a tender regard for the alligators,

and defends them on all occasions (until our neighbors believe that Eleanor Walton has married a man who holds the crocodile sacred, as did the ancient Egyptians) is nobody's business.

THE END.

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